THE ART OF GEARS OF WAR 4

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DARK HORSE BOOKS

CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	07
ACT I	23
ACT II	99
ACT III	119
ACT IV	167
ACT V	189
MARKETING	209

INTRODUCTION

Gears of War 4. There's something intimidating about the number "4" in a franchise-based title. At once it says, "This better relate to what's come before" (which is to say, it clearly represents the franchise), but also, "This better be something new" (which is to say, it advances the franchise). Ten years have passed since *Gears of War* made its debut in 2006. Its look, feel, mood, and game play helped to define a generation of games. But times have changed, as have player expectations.

Our first goal for *Gears of War 4* was to make a game that felt more contemporary, one that had moved with the times in its tone and storytelling, but also in its visuals. Early in the development process, we tried a more realism-based approach to the *Gears of War* art style, but it just didn't sit right with us. *Gears of War*, from the very beginning, has always been highly stylized and we believe it truly benefits from that stylization. So we looked for a way to increase believability in our world and characters without losing the style that defines *Gears of War*—a style we defined as "authentic." It is a style that is at once both truer to reality in greater believability of function, while also staying true to *Gears of War* so that we're enabling all the fantastical sights, sounds, and events needed to drive the player's heroic adventures as JD Fenix.

For me, the actual art design process was very much like our game design process—a journey of discovery, fueled by iteration. We may have had one destination in mind when we started, but the process we went through to get there meant we often ended up in a completely different (and often far better) place. Our Northern Italy inspiration is a clear example of this. We started simply with the Dolomite Mountains as an inspiration for the Wilds of Sera. As we continued to look for inspiration for other areas of the game—a giant dam, Marcus's villa, a circular city—Northern Italy just kept coming back time after time. It was as if we couldn't escape it! So instead of fighting it, we embraced it fully, making for what I believe is a much more stylistically cohesive world.

I hope what you take away from reading this book is more than just a collection of pretty pictures. I hope you'll see some of our journey and that you'll enjoy the trip as much as we have.

Thanks,
Rod

PROLOGUE

Through a remembrance speech by First Minister Jinn, *Gears of War 4* opens with three significant battles from the history of Sera. At Aspho Point, COG commandos raid a UIR weapons facility in the most pivotal battle of the Pendulum Wars. Just a few years later, valiant COG soldiers defend the House of Sovereigns as Locust erupt from beneath the surface on Emergence Day. Finally, at Anvil Gate, Hoffman and a group of survivors make a last stand on the final day of the Locust War, hoping that Marcus Fenix and Delta Squad can complete their mission before it's too late.

ASPHO FIELDS

This was a reference to the novelization *Aspho Fields*. We wanted to create a place that represented the Union of Independent Republics, which to this point hadn't really been represented that much in the game franchise. The comic books have done the most exploration of UIR in terms of uniforms and characters, but we were trying to create a secret seaside military research base that the player would exit or escape via Marlin boats. We created some contrast against the rest of the settings with a slushy, Seattle-type snow to give this mission a different vibe and started the player off at night to help set the tone for the game.

ASPHO POINT

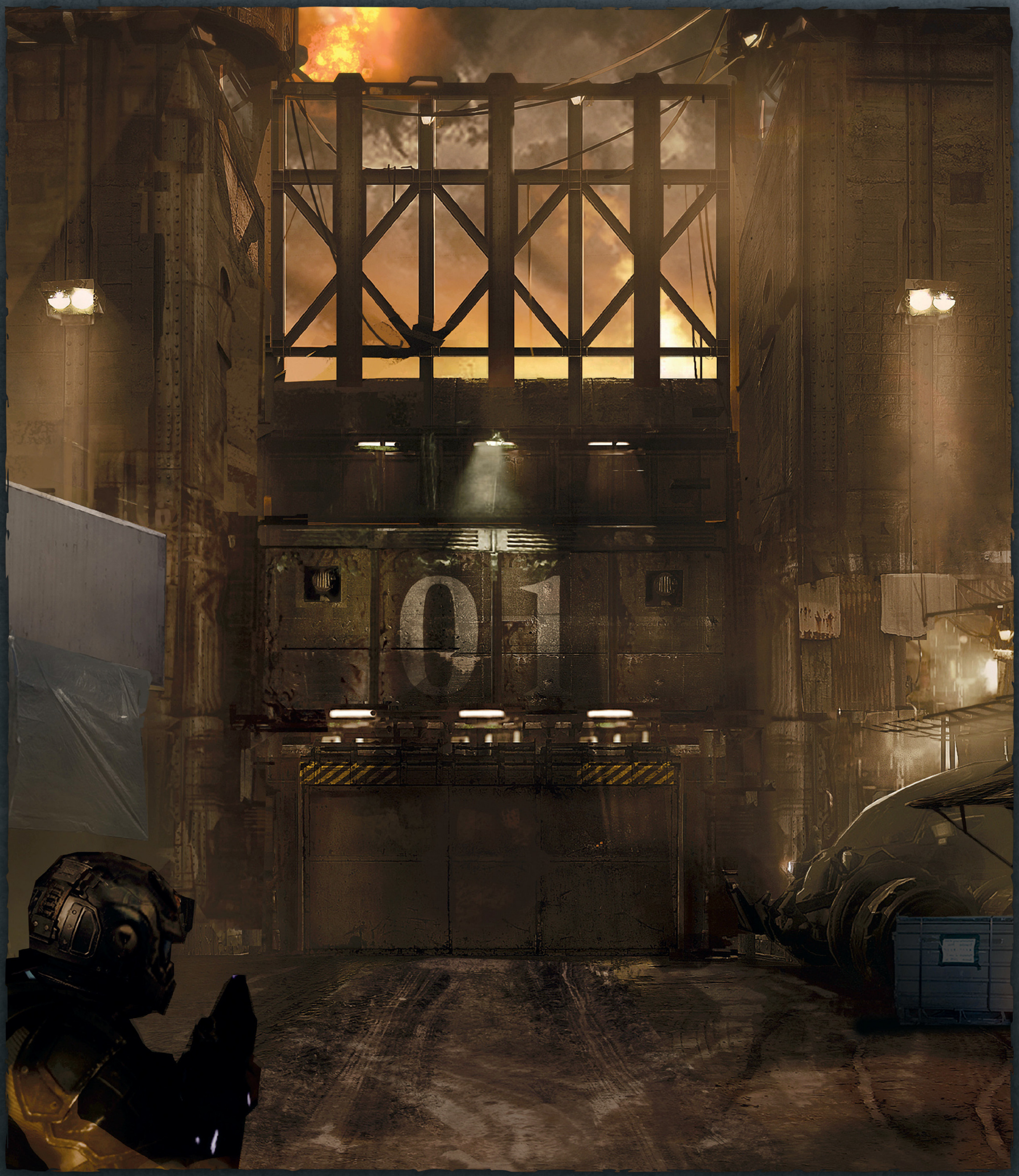
Rather than the blue of the COG and the red of the Locust, we explored several color schemes to help differentiate the UIR from the other factions, ultimately focusing on green. The mission starts off as a stealth operation to infiltrate a secret military installation for weapons research, with the goal of stealing the Hammer of Dawn, but we got to a point where we actually wanted it to be a full assault. There was a war going on around the player, so rather than sneaking in through the quiet of night, we turned it into an action scene where there are tracers in the sky, planes and helicopters overhead, a crashed vehicle burning, and mortars landing all around.

HOUSE OF SOVEREIGNS

The goal here was to revisit Emergence Day. We decided it would be interesting to go back to a place the player had visited in previous *Gears of War* games and bring to mind the familiar sense of being back in the Locust War . . . but with a twist, because the player is experiencing day one. We worked hard to add small details, like the white van from *Gears of War* on the stairs—we made sure the van was part of the convoy that arrives so it ultimately ends up there.

ANVIL GATE

Anvil Gate represented a last stand. It was the location of a big battle in the Pendulum Wars, where Hoffman led a large defense against the UIR. It's the same location from the end of the Locust War in *Gears of War 3*, when the player leaves Hoffman and Bernie at Anvil Gate for them to hold the position, as Hoffman did in the previous war. Aspho Point took longer than House of Sovereigns and Anvil Gate because it was built from scratch. We were looking at how to imagine a UIR military base, whereas the locations for House of Sovereigns and Anvil Gate were previously referenced. How do we take it beyond what players have seen before and create a visually intense scene which provides a sense that this is the end?



PENDULUM VETERANS

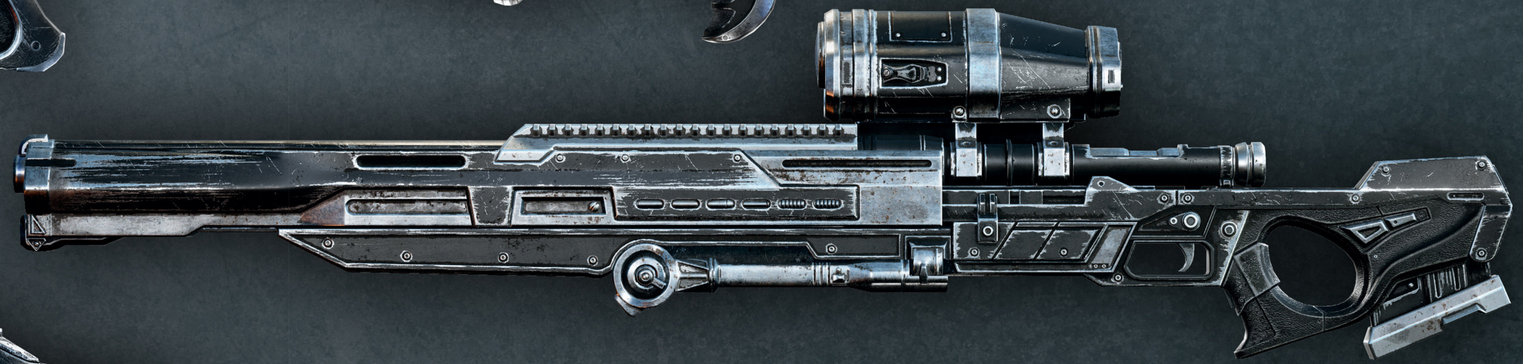
Aspho Point, House of Sovereigns, and Anvil Gate are flashbacks played through an interactive speech delivered by First Minister Jinn. By going back in time forty-plus years, we were able to compare and contrast the present-day, wheelchair-bound Hoffman in his eighties with the forty- or forty-five-year-old major at Aspho Point. We created this sense of transition by showing familiar faces at different ages.

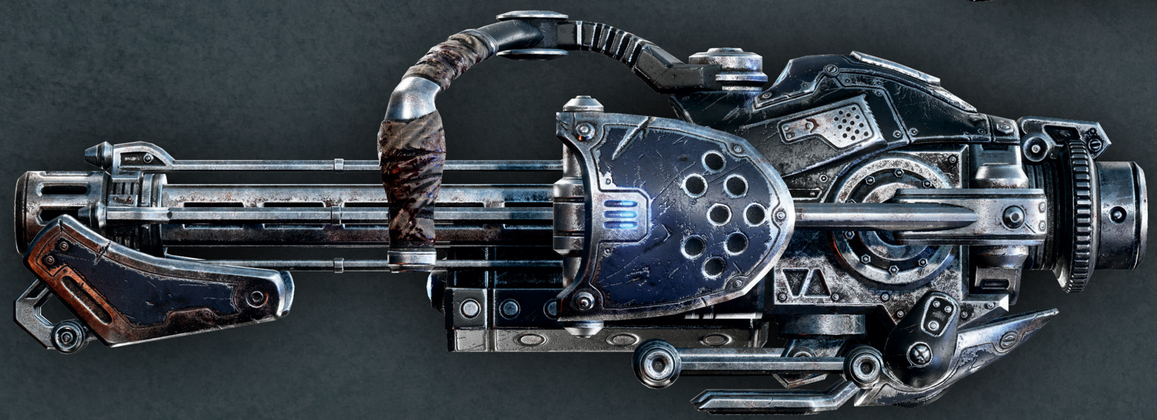
Jinn's presentation provides the opportunity to see Dom again. He was a young private during the Pendulum Wars, which occurred almost fifteen years before the events of the original *Gears* trilogy.

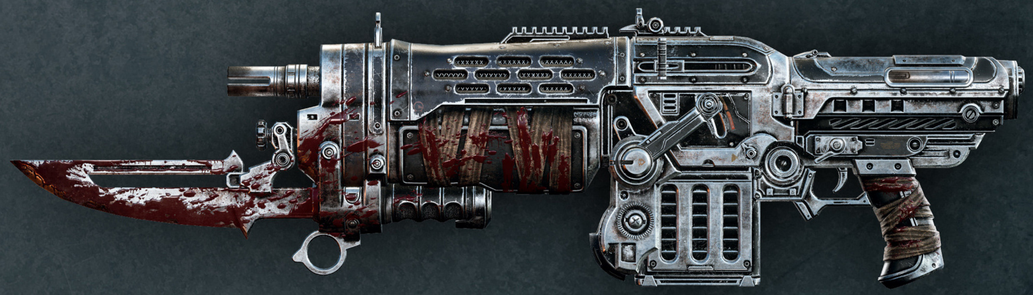
WEAPONS

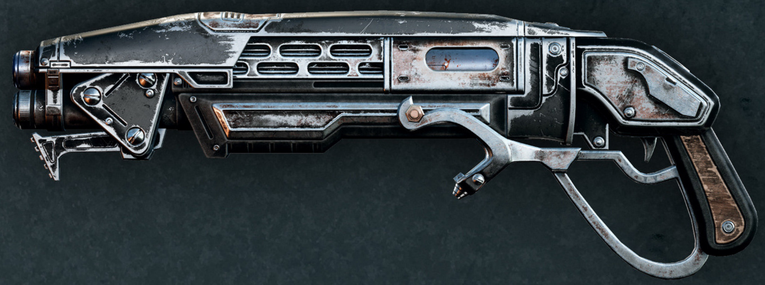
This is a collection of prominent weaponry featured in the *Gears of War* universe. The UIR only had a few rifles that we'd seen in a previous game, *Judgment*. One of them was a green Markza sniper rifle (*right*), but having an entire army filled with sniper rifles was not interesting from a game play perspective. We had to remove the scope and cut the barrel down to turn it into more of an assault or scout-rifle type of weapon.

The Prologue is the only place where the player can use the Hammer of Dawn. Every other weapon here carries forward into *Gears 4* and can be played throughout, but the Hammer of Dawn is a unique case.









ACT I

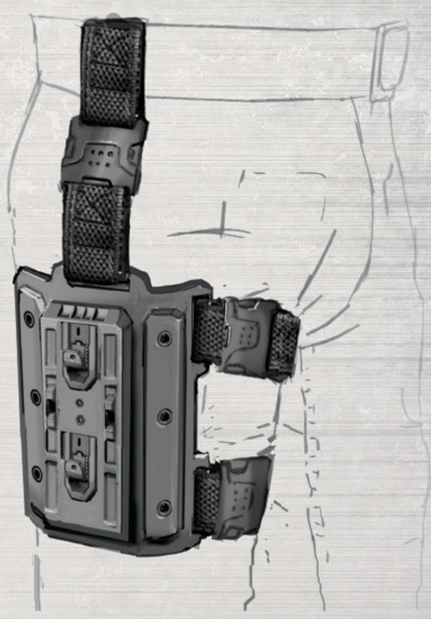
Twenty-five years after the end of the Locust War, the re-formed Coalition of Ordered Governments has grouped the recovering population into walled settlements, protected from the increasing windflares that ravage Sera. A faction of Outsiders rejected the oppressive rules of the new government, building villages in the Wilds and raiding COG settlements for materials and power. When COG citizens go missing, First Minister Jinn assumes the Outsiders are at fault and militarizes her automated DeeBee security units. The fight culminates in a battle at an Outsider village where JD Fenix, Del, Kait, Reyna, and Oscar repel the COG attack.

RAID

We didn't want to start the game with our hero as a Gear, so that meant he wouldn't be wearing any armor. JD Fenix is a character trapped between worlds. He comes from the Coalition of Ordered Governments (so he has his holster, backpack, and military boots), but he also has Outsider aspects (like his reclaimed leather jacket). We tried to mix and match those elements for both him and Del to further convey the concept of duality. They're former COG soldiers trying to find a way to fit into the Outsider life.

OUTSIDER JD FENIX

When we design characters, we always try to think about “the cosplay moment.” Would I recognize the character at a convention if a cosplayer was dressed like this? These pages show the use of tech integrated with reclaimed clothing to help visually differentiate the Outsiders and make each character unique. There were early explorations with a hood and goggles to protect JD from the wind. We used that idea more subtly with the green scarf after deciding we didn’t want to hide his face with the hood. We even broke JD’s nose to give him more character.



In multiplayer, you need friend-versus-foe color indications. The blue shoulder lights achieved that for Outsider character models without the use of armor. While *Gears of War* is a grounded sci-fi game, we got to a point where we didn't have any tech on our characters, and they felt too contemporary. We explored ways to integrate more tech to bring back that sci-fi feel.

Kait is a native Outsider, so we didn't want to give her a lot of COG cues. She reclaims fabric and has multipurpose elements in her wardrobe. We worked with a fashion designer who specializes in reclaimed fabrics to help inspire us as to the type of wardrobe that she could have. Key visual cues like her knit beanie didn't come until later. Our studio head was at lunch one day, and he saw a woman in a beanie that looked exactly like our character. There was something about that look that made her feel more grounded. Without the beanie, Kait appeared a little too punk rock.

OUTSIDER KAIT DIAZ

We explored different ways to bring out details in the Outsider world—for example, Reyna's and Kait's hairstyles indicate their marital status. If their ponytail hangs over their right shoulder, it means that they are with someone, whereas on their left shoulder, the way that Kait has hers, it means they're still single. We started off with a normal haircut and eventually added beads to the front of her hair to add some texture and interest. We added a cuff to her hair to keep her ponytail in place; then we felt like dyeing her ponytail purple would be a way to hint at a little bit of rebellion and the fact that she's trying to stand out. It's something that someone her age would do.

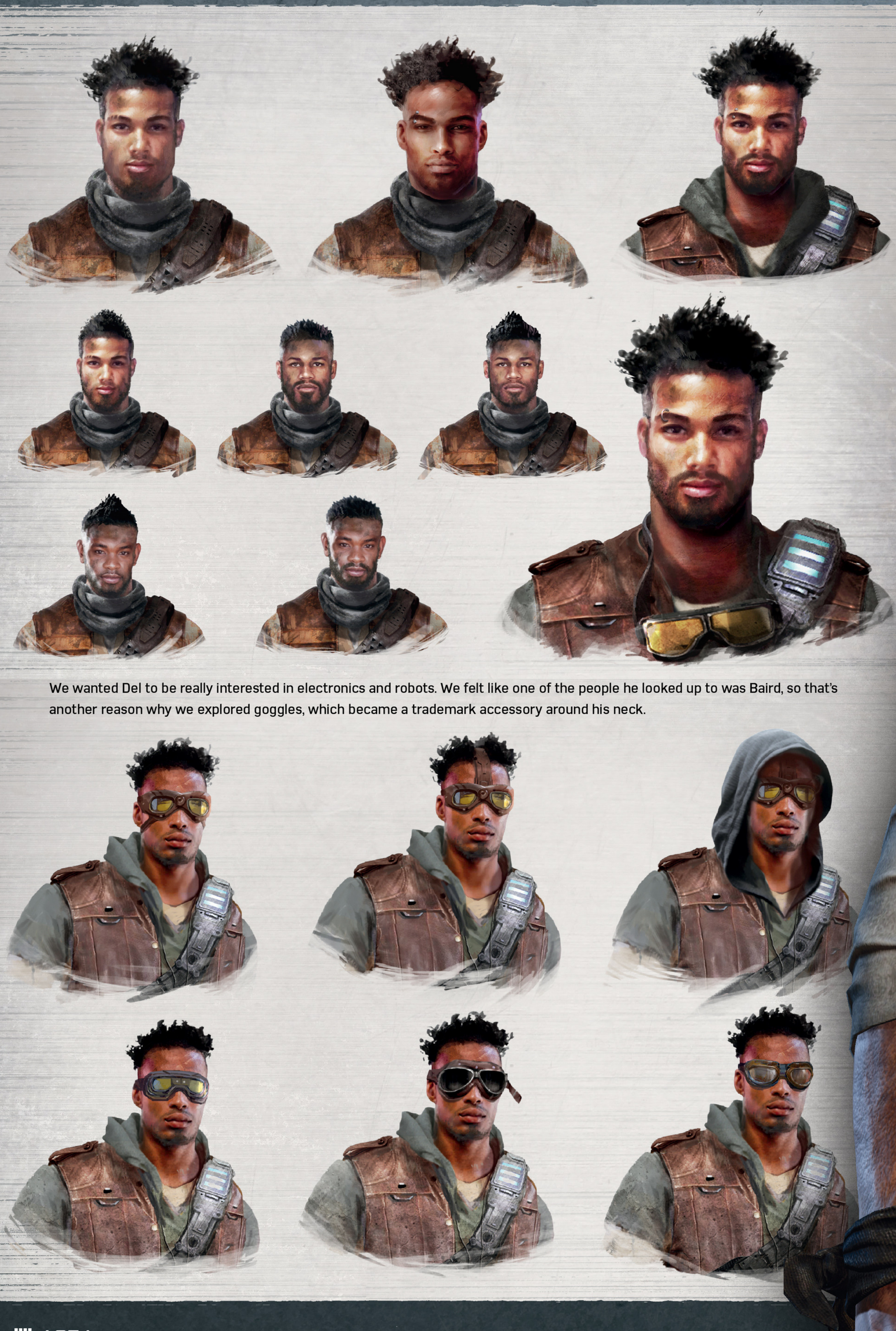
All the characters wear layers. We knew they were going to peel off an outer layer to put on armor, so we wanted to make sure we had a clear understanding of how the character could take that jacket off and put armor on top of it.

Kait has Latino roots, so we gave her raven-black hair and slightly larger, darker eyebrows, as well as freckles. We felt like the mixture of these darker Latin American traits with Caucasian traits gave her an interesting look. We were afraid of making her look too regimental, because she wouldn't stand out in contrast with the other main characters. We wanted her to feel young and to wear something that she would be happy wearing, so she wouldn't just be in some military-green trench coat. She's attractive, but she also has purpose. The scratch on her cheek was a late addition. We had banged up JD pretty badly and we didn't want Kait to not have gone through some of the same struggles to survive.

Compared to JD, we thought of Del as much more in tune with the Outsider lifestyle. He was quicker to adapt, so we wanted him to be a little shaggier. He is willing to let his hair grow out, whereas JD has kept his military haircut; maybe he still polishes his boots and lives by the regimen he had in the military.

OUTSIDER DEL WALKER

With an ensemble cast, it's not just about how an individual character stands out, but how he or she complements the other characters. We'd often put the three of them together and look to see if we had enough contrast between them, if the colors were complementary to each other, and if they felt like a unit. The COG is very blue and metallic. We wanted the Outsiders to be earthier, so we went with more natural colors. We tried to find ways to express the back-to-nature hippie commune feeling that the Outsiders have.



We wanted Del to be really interested in electronics and robots. We felt like one of the people he looked up to was Baird, so that's another reason why we explored goggles, which became a trademark accessory around his neck.

You can see the difference between the concept and the final version of Del's face. Our goal was to strive for more realistic faces, and we ended up doing a lot of work on creating characters that could exist on earth today, but we realized as we started to build those faces that they didn't work inside of *Gears*, especially when they were interacting with preexisting *Gears* characters. When Del talked to Marcus, it looked strange because one was photorealistic and one was stylized to match *Gears*. We had to go back and change JD's and Del's faces to give them proportions that fit better in a stylized *Gears of War* game.

OSCAR DIAZ

Oscar is a larger-than-life character with lots of personality. He's a former soldier who has taken to the Outsider ways. We wanted him to be out of shape because he drinks and eats too much. He's living life fully after having seen a lot of bad stuff in the wars. It was interesting to explore an older character that had a lot of muscles. We referenced Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger to get the sense of that tone, and then gave him an islander feel with tattoos and other cues. We ended up with this bolder motorcycle-gang member, less like a true islander. We didn't want to push the islander feel too far but kept the sarong, the hairstyle, and the tattoos.

OSCAR DETAILS

Another thing that started to emerge from our concept work was the notion that Outsiders tend to wear something around their waist. Kait has her shirt wrapped around her waist, and Oscar has his sarong, and then Reyna has her skirt. It really helped to tie the Diaz clan together.

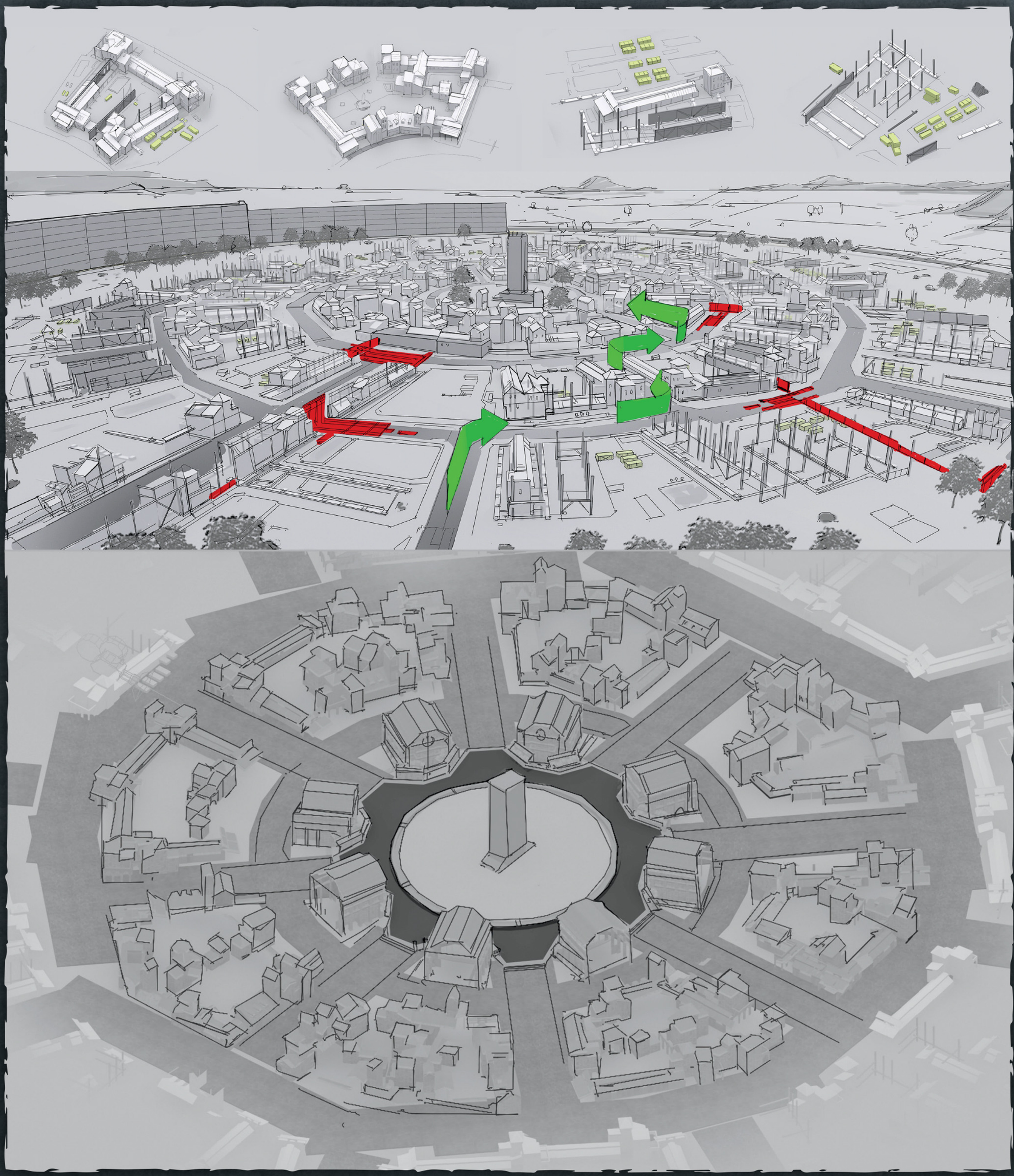
Oscar is Kait's uncle, and he's tough but lovable. He loves parties, wine, women, and song. The 1970s motorcycle culture influence is present here, along with a little bit of Maori culture reflected in his tattoos and his necklace. The beaded beard is a style from Viking culture.

SETTLEMENT 5

We looked for real-world examples of circular towns built in rings, and we found one in Palmanova in Northern Italy—a fort town that was built outward in concentric circles. We wanted the settlement to feel like it was planned, so what the Palmanovans did in hundreds of years, the bots of Settlement 5 did in days by laying down these prefabricated houses and structures.

CITY OF RINGS

We saw this robot-curated settlement as a juxtaposition to nature. It just lies down, opens up, and builds outward from the center construction hub—that pillar in the middle—to create a protected settlement for residents. You can see the solar-collecting wind wall that opens and braces the city against windflares. There are eight teeth in the cog, eight Allfathers, and the Octus Canon—everything in the Coalition is based around the number eight. We try to layer that wherever we can. In this case, because it's a construct, having the eight teeth in the city was important to us. We also wanted these water trenches rather than a huge rail system because they were meant to hide all the mechanisms that powered the wall.



A close-up of the wall as it wraps around the city. We put in the water to bring to mind a medieval moat.

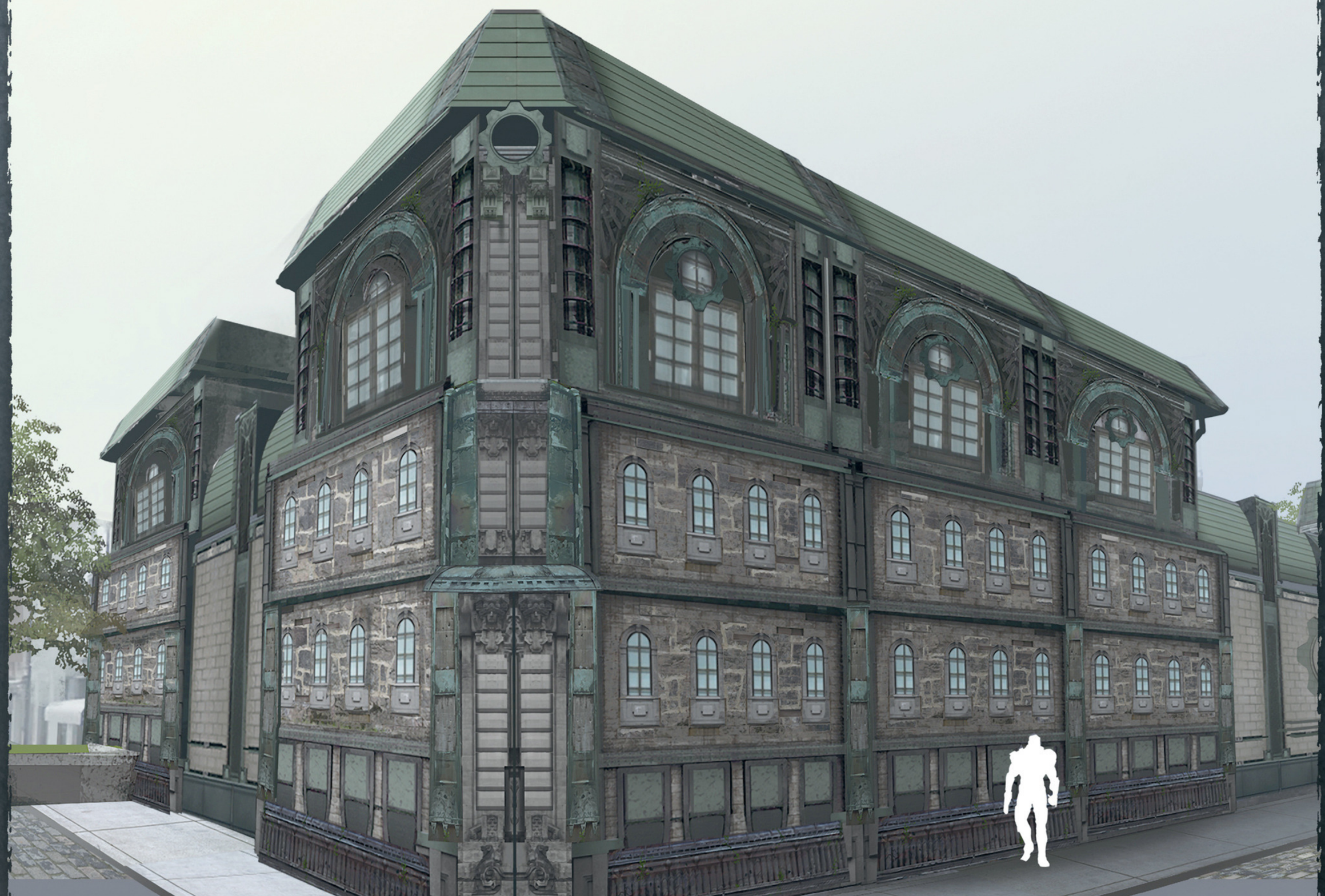
CONSTRUCTION ZONE

The very center of the city is the most complete, but it's not populated. As the player heads further out, they get to points where walls haven't been built yet, or windows and doors are missing. Then, further still, the streets are missing, and the player can go underground. Eventually they reach actual dirt. We wanted the player to feel the progression of the rings and the city as they worked their way from the outside in, feel the construction getting more and more complete. And the same on the way back out: they can feel they are making progress because they can see that it is getting less and less built up.

We explored the idea of an entirely separate layer of construction underneath the city that contains all the infrastructure in order to provide an impression that there was a place with all these pipes and tunnels that the player could traverse.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

One of our art direction philosophies was “reclaimed beauty,” whereas in the previous games it was “destroyed beauty.” We meant *reclaimed* in different ways. In this case we were talking about the notion of recycling and repurposing of materials. We used Warsaw as an example: Warsaw got flattened into almost nothing during the war. The residents would go out to settlements in the surrounding areas, break down buildings, take the bricks, and bring them back home to rebuild. We wanted that contrast between old, robot-reclaimed bricks and machine-fabricated buildings with an artificial, mechanical aesthetic.



COPPER

We started to focus on a friendlier concept for the city by making the buildings smaller, and we introduced this idea of copper roofs, which in the old days had been the aged copper. We thought, “Why don’t we have new copper?” That’s part of how we started to create the look for the city.

COVER

How do you create opportunities for cover in a prefabricated city? In the past we used fallen pillars and destroyed walls. Here we added planters in the middle of the street, or two-story buildings with brownstone steps. In the outer rings were stacks of construction materials to take cover behind.

The “2” on this wall is meant to represent what ring or zone the player is in. Each city has five rings, so the player knows what ring they're in based on what the security wall shows. It was also important to us for the story to feel like it takes place in autumn. As we were creating environments, we'd test ourselves: “Are we telling our fall story? Have we conveyed that it's fall?” We actually had to go back and change the foliage, making green trees much more orange to accurately depict the season.

GOVERNMENT

The Coalition is known for larger-than-life, grand architecture with huge eagles on poles and large statues and looming buildings of metal and stone. Settlement 5 is the equivalent of a village or a town—not one of the bigger cities. We tried to find ways to put the grandeur of the Coalition architecture into these more modest buildings without going so over the top that they feel like they don't belong.

The Maternity Annex is a medical facility filled with government propaganda. The large statue conveys the feeling that it's a government building.

MONOLITH

These are explorations for the construction hub. The top image on the facing page is a photo of Palmanova merged with our concepts for Settlement 5. These were some of the things we could do with the construction hub, like making it a large crane, a DeeBee manufacturing facility, or a solar panel collector. We went through many different explorations about what the construction hub was going to be, ultimately settling on a monolith to guide you into the center of town. We thought about real-time strategy games, when a vehicle pulls up and then unfolds into a base. That was the way we saw the construction hub: it's the first and only thing that's placed there.

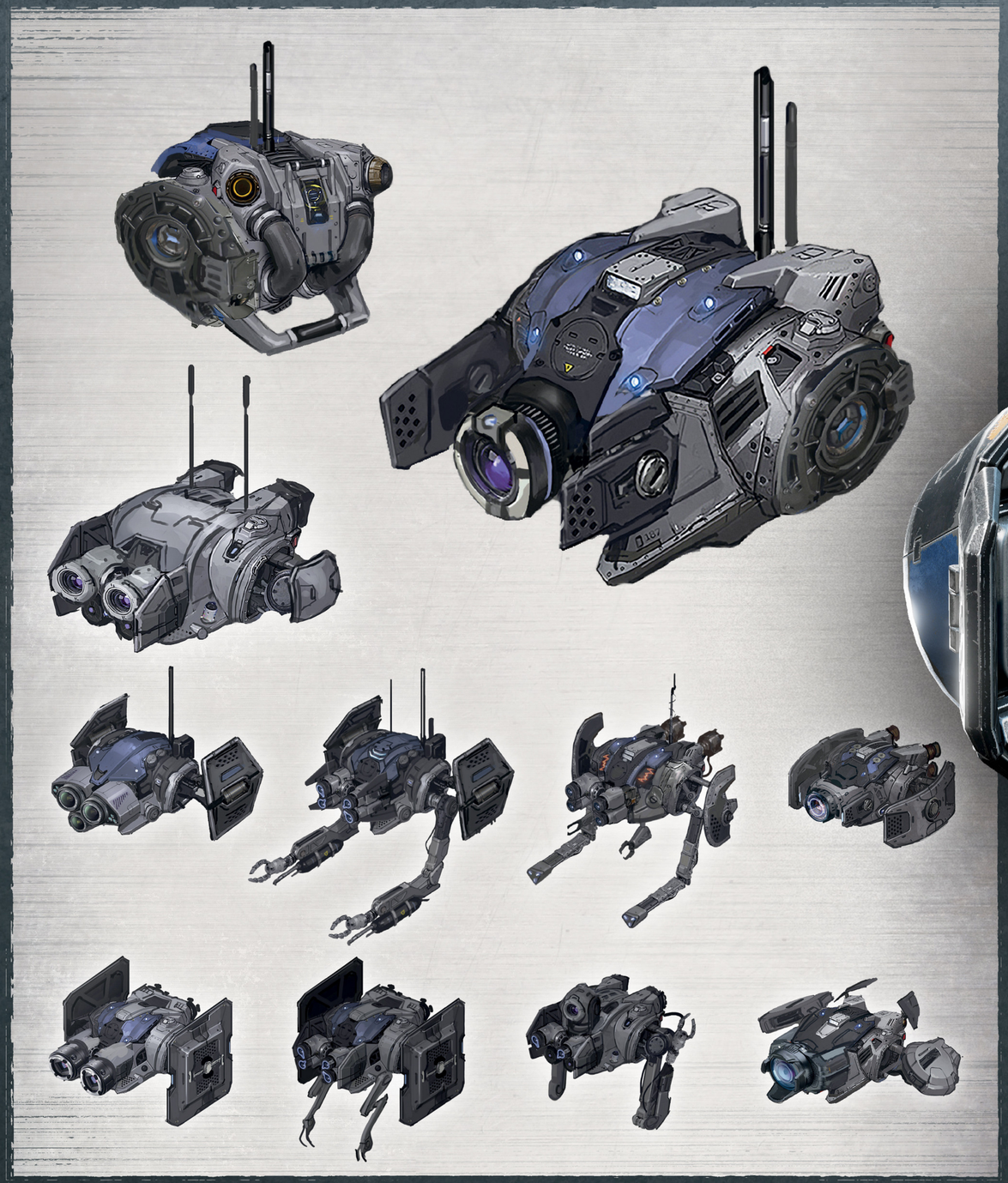
HUB

We explored the idea of the hub rising up out of the ground. Ultimately it felt like that execution was not viable, so we ended up grounding it but allowed for the fact that it could still lower when it was finished.

There's a lot going on underneath the surface, such as the layer containing the actual robot construction deployments.

WATCHER

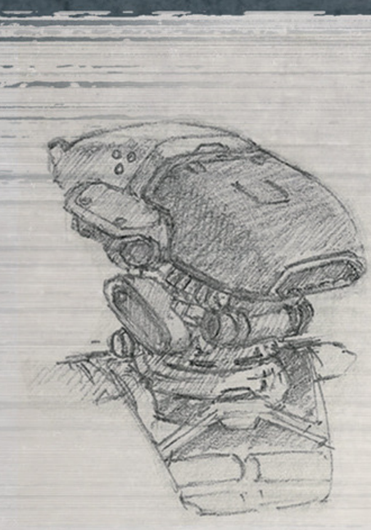
With the DeeBees—and especially the Watcher—we wanted to make sure they had an aesthetic connection to Jack, the robot from earlier *Gears of War* games. The Watcher is essentially the evolution of a Jackbot, repurposed as a security camera. It has a lot of the same functional elements, like its little antigrav engines, but instead of four eyes in the front, it's got a big telephoto lens it can use for scouting and reporting.

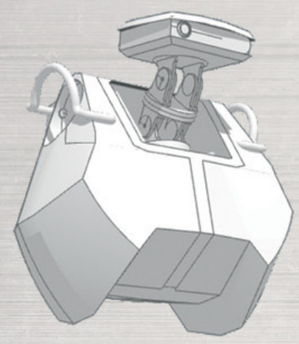


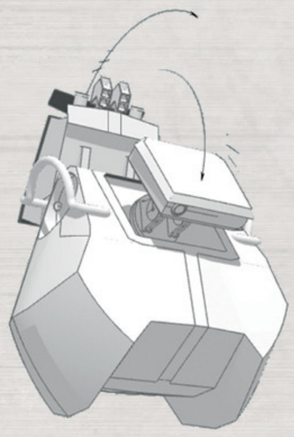
The Watcher is a piece of technology that was created just to keep an eye on the citizens and make sure that everything is safe. It is like an overprotective parent, so it isn't there to create a police state, but rather to watch over this regrowing human population.

SHEPHERD

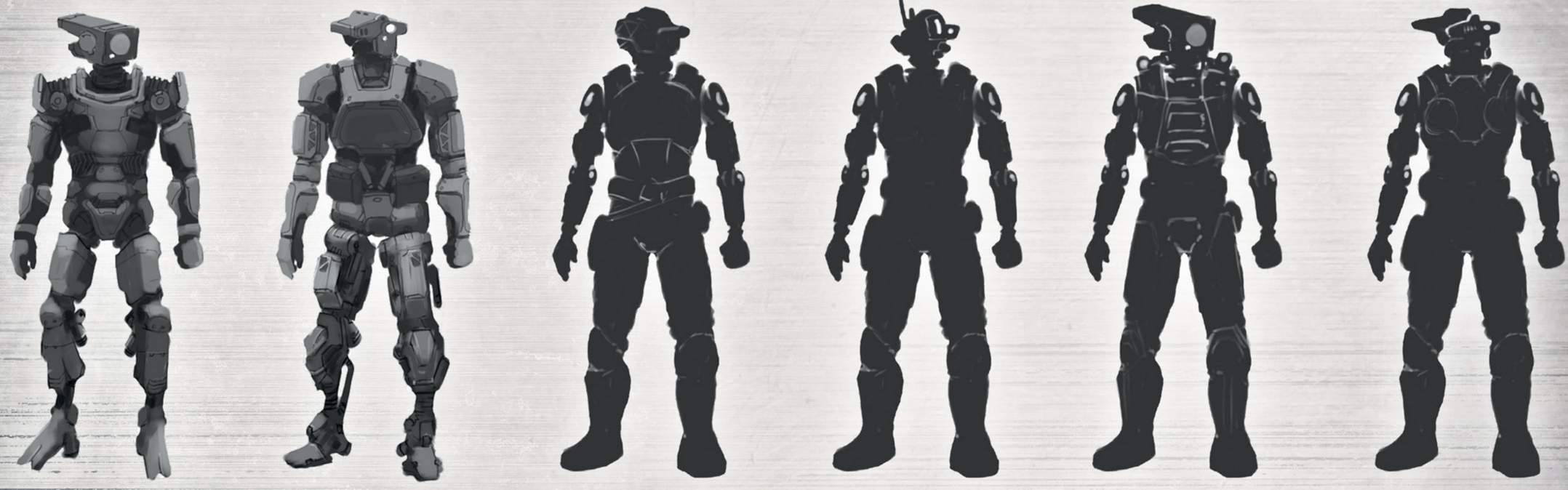
With the DeeBee Shepherd, we were trying to find a baseline for the new robot army. We really wanted it to stand out and be different, but our non-humanoid ideas were not practical from a game play perspective. We needed to have a human frame to shoot at. It was important that the Shepherd walked and took cover, and that it had limbs the player could shoot at. We knew we wanted it to be a playable character in multiplayer as well. We used elements of COG armor, but it has exposed parts in its leg, back, and hip structure that don't look human. The wiring in the limbs is wrapped with a cloth so they don't look too different or scary.







The fiction is that these are the police for the COG now. They need to be able to walk around the streets and not look too threatening and intense, so people will respond to them. We treated them as peacekeepers and security. The government wants the population to feel comfortable around them, so the more human they look, the more comfortable people will be.



The nice thing about all the lights on the robots was that we could use them to identify friend versus foe. When they initially glow yellow, they're threatening, but when the robots go lethal and they're very dangerous, the lights turn red, the way that the Swarm do. They could actually turn blue as well, as seen in the original concept.

We wanted it to feel like there was a single creator behind these machines. Damon Baird loved Jack and based all of his creations on these themes.

There's a bunch of stuff in the game that comes from Baird's company, DB Industries. The DBi mark is seen on the guns and the fabricator. We gave those items a design language that looked like it came from the same designer—as if they were built out of modular parts.

We have two different types of Enforcer weapon: the Shock Enforcer and the Lethal Enforcer. The Shock Enforcer's the white one used for nonlethal patrolling of citizens.

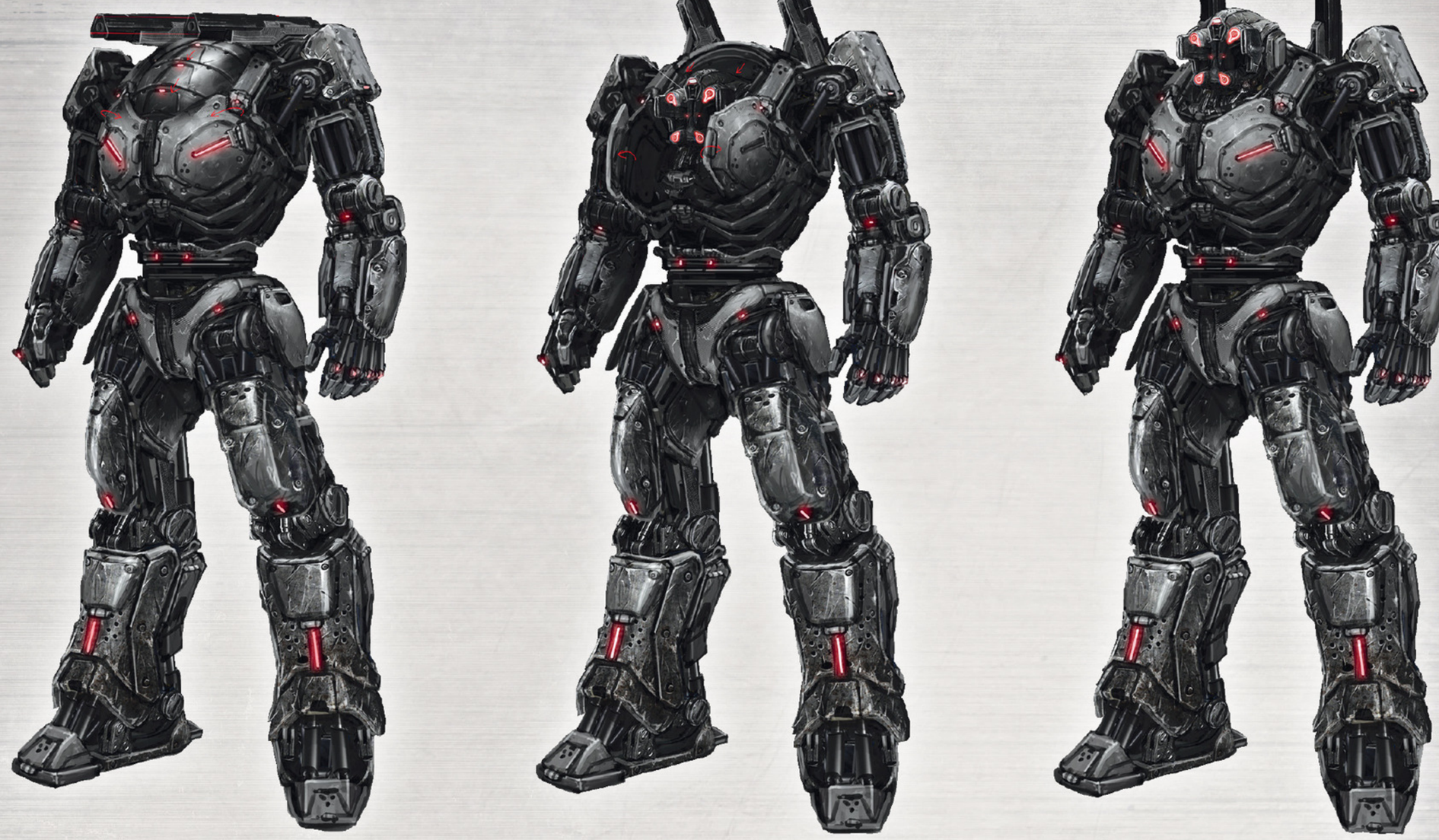
DEADEYE

When you create an army for *Gears*, you need to have a sniper, so there's a Swarm sniper and there's a robot sniper: the Deadeye. You have to be able to spot the silhouette, so we gave it a little antenna and a single monocular eye so that the player can spot him from a distance by the glow of the gun and the eye.

DR-1

The DR-1 is a play on words: if you spell it out, it spells *drone*. We based it on a Shepherd, and we thought no one had ever seen a robot with an exo-skeleton, where more parts had been added onto the outside.

This weapon is the Overkill, a quad-barreled shotgun, and it's what identifies a DR-1 as a Protector. A lot of the names for the robots have to do with their role in society. We wanted the shotgun to feel like it could be built on an assembly line by robots.



We enjoyed the idea of a retractable head to make the Protector feel like it was armoring up like a tank. But we found this didn't really come across, and it ended up looking more headless than anything; it wasn't really conveying what we wanted. We ended up bulking them up in general rather than giving them large turrets on the shoulders and those sorts of things.

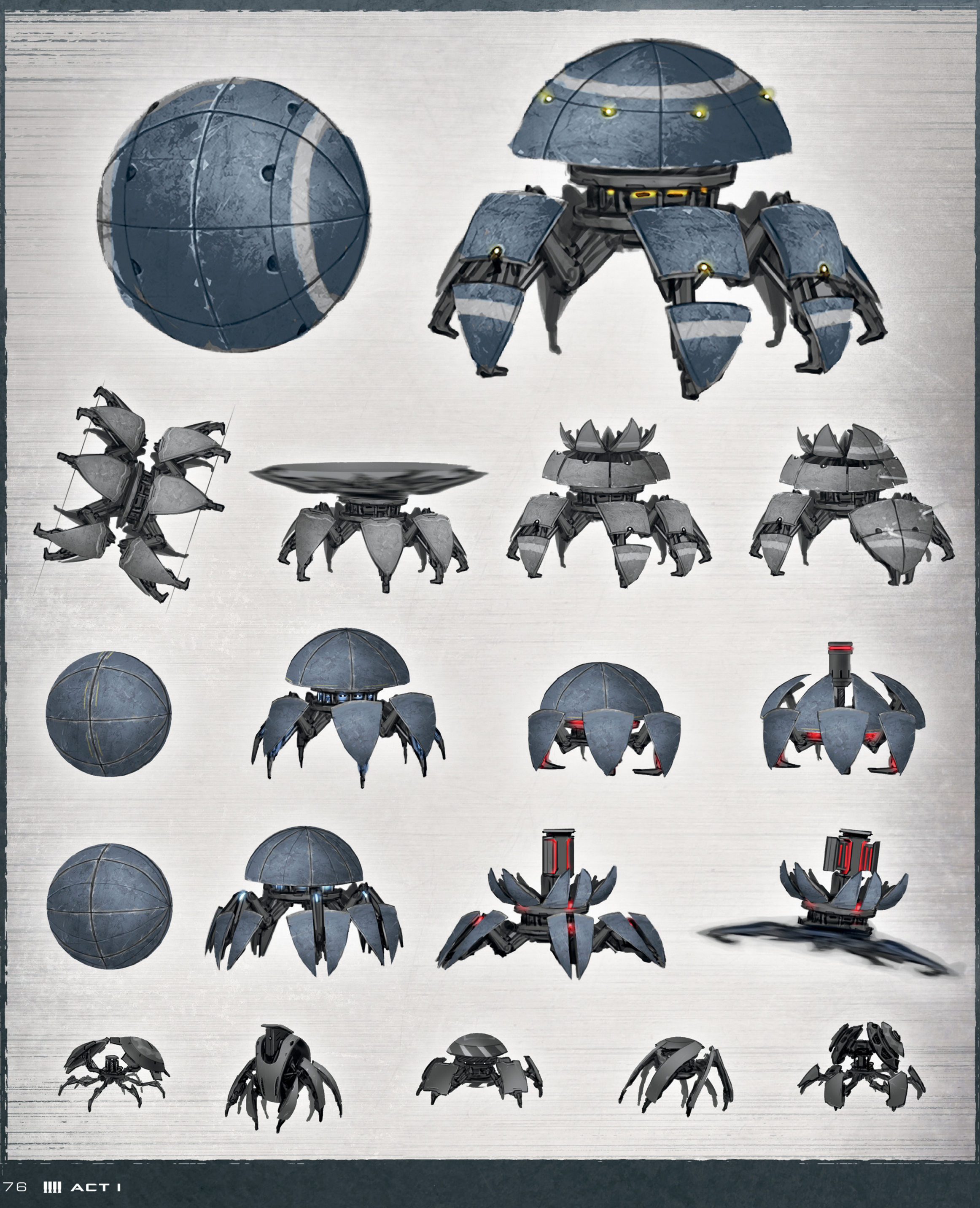
JINN BOT

The Jinn Bot was inspired by airport greeters; in some big American cities they have these perfectly outlined glass “greeters” with a projection on them that make you feel like you’re being greeted by a member of the staff. The idea is that Jinn is in New Ephyra, far from the Wilds, and the only way she can make contact is through this command robot.

DBi

TRACKER

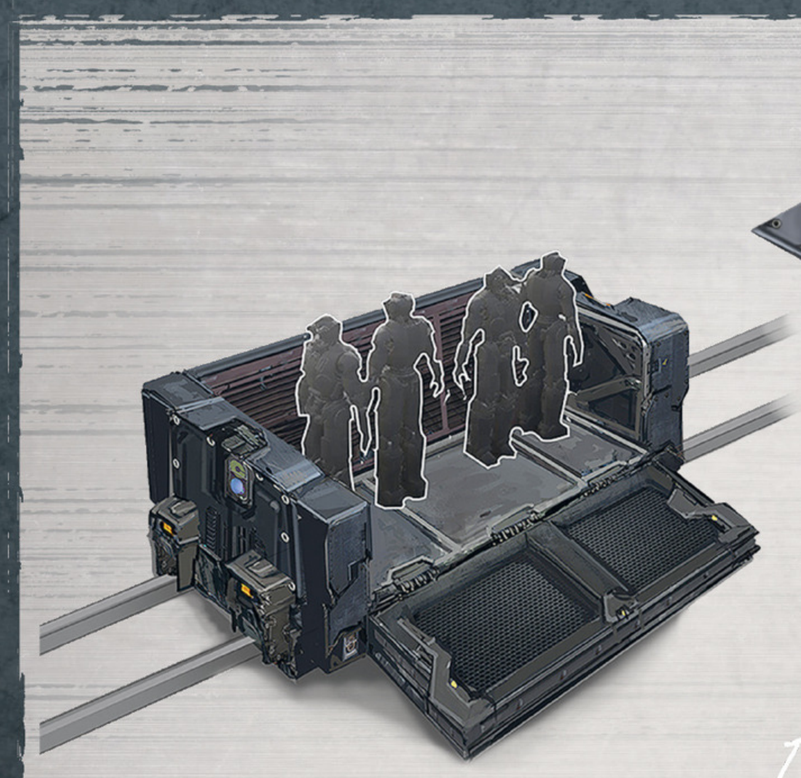
The DeeBee Trackers are one of the flushing enemies, designed to force the player out of cover. They are lots of fun to combat, because they roll up next to the player, open up, and explode. There are two versions in the game—one that explodes, and one with an electric attack. These are explorations of how the Tracker unfolds.

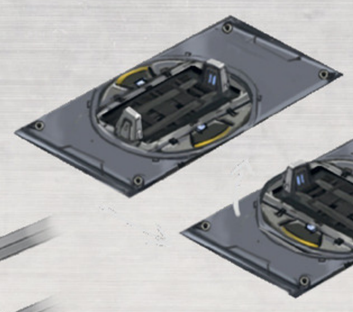


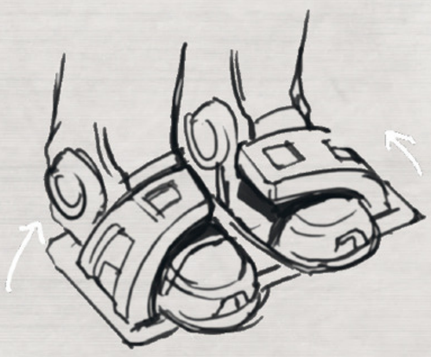
We wanted it to have different modes, so its closed-ball form can roll around on different surfaces and is fairly protected, and when it opens a little bit, it has tracks to move with more dexterity. When it opens up, the legs behave like tracks on a tank. Then it opens all the way, pops its top like a bouncing Betty mine, and explodes.

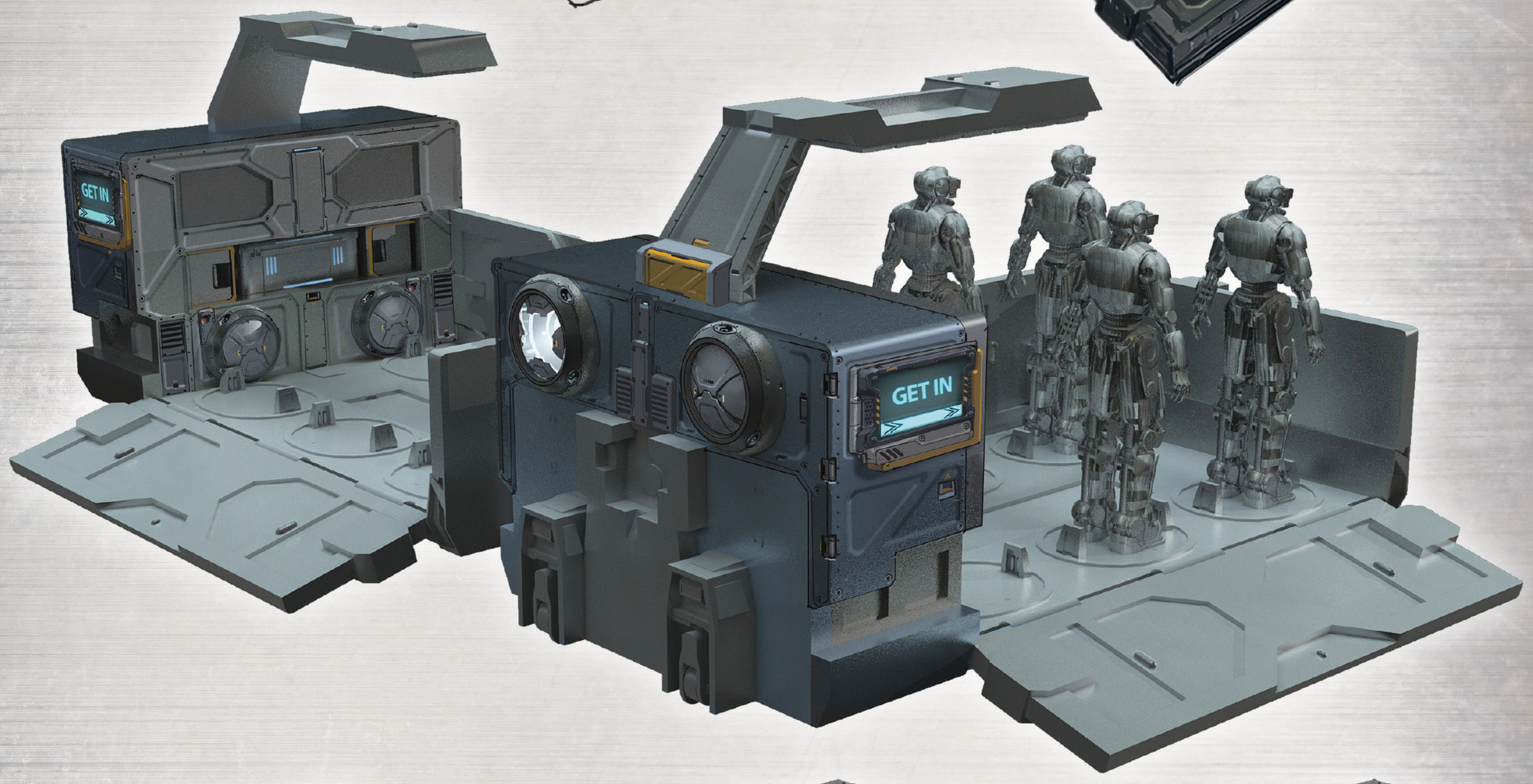
CART

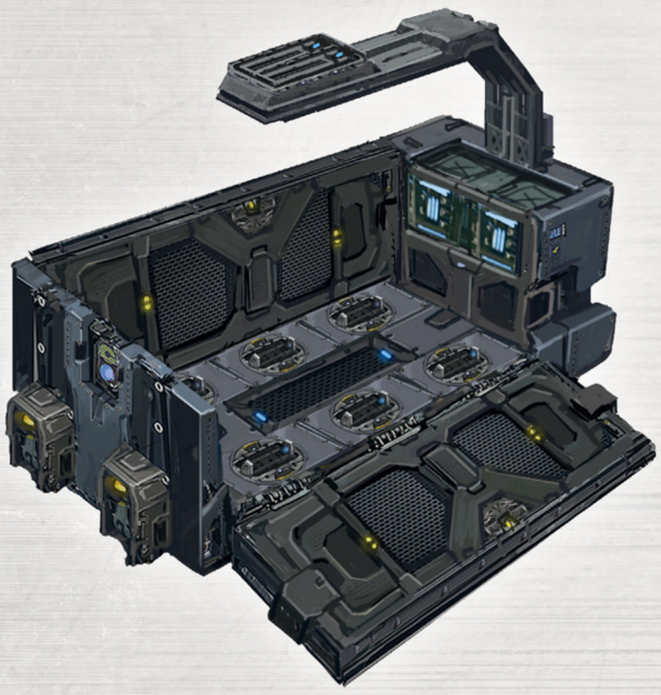
The security DeeBees have their own cart system to quickly move around the settlement. It's designed to open on either side, and it's got a hook on top for storage inside the DeeBee facility. We were trying to find ways to quickly bring enemies into a game play space so we didn't have to walk them a long distance to get into the battle. The cart represented a quick deployment method that could send them along the train rails. They enhance the game play because they're not only delivering an enemy—they serve as cover as well.

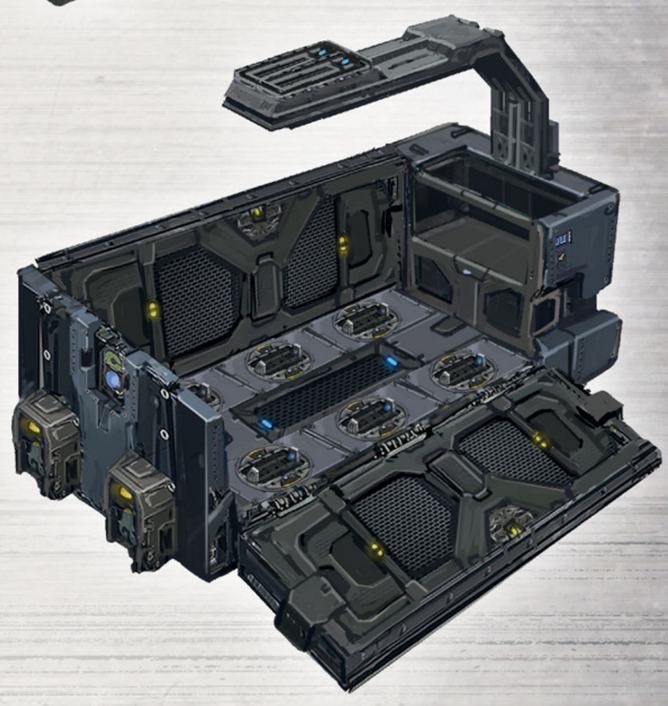










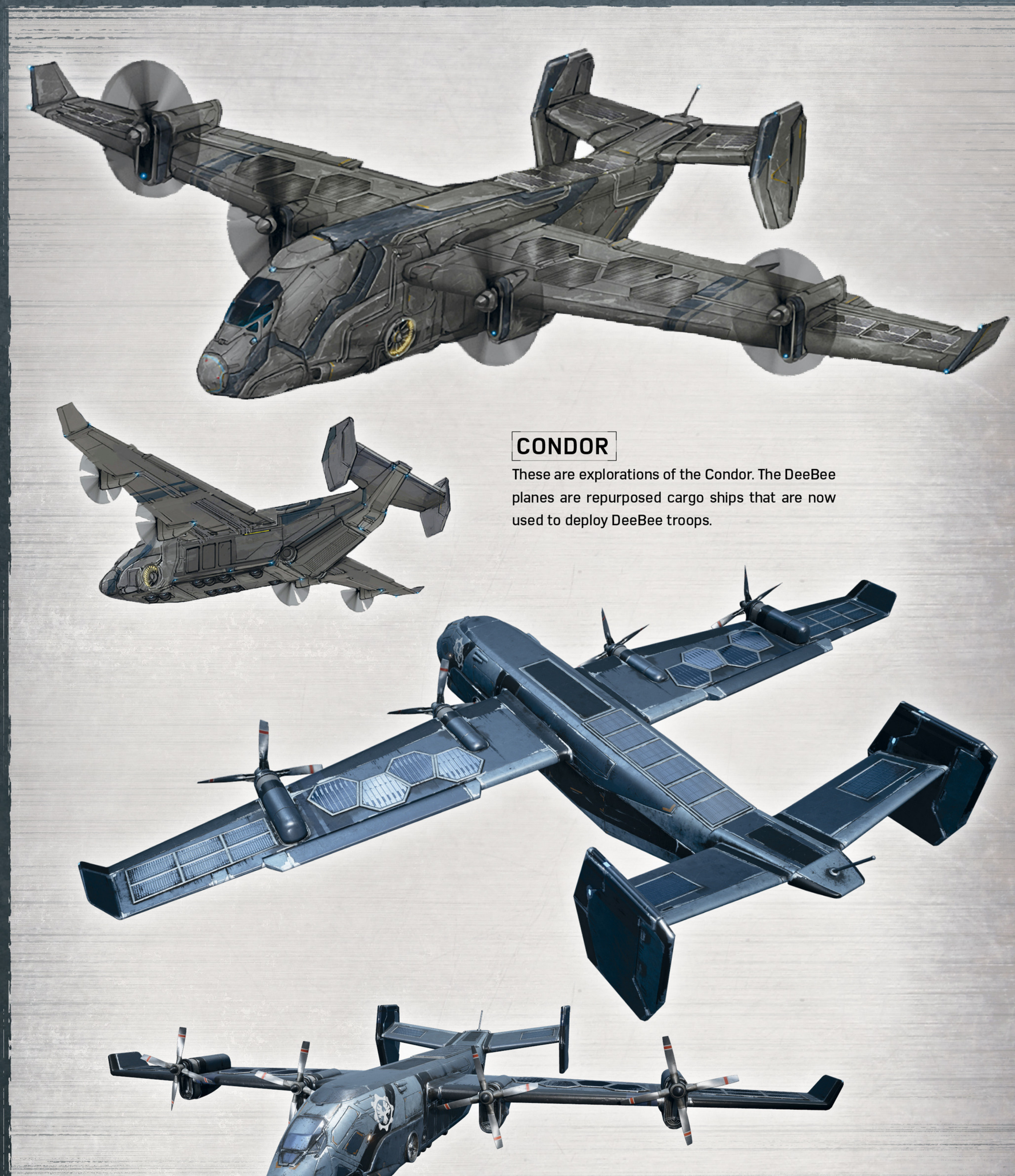


DROP POD

The DeeBee drop pod was another way to bring the enemies in quickly. The Condor airplanes fly overhead and drop these twelve-sided pods into the space, which pop open and rapidly deploy robots into a battlefield.

VEHICLES

The vehicles in this game reflect elements of the classic *Gears* style, but we wanted to surprise players with how those elements were used. Many of them were designed with military utility in mind but have been adapted for a variety of uses.

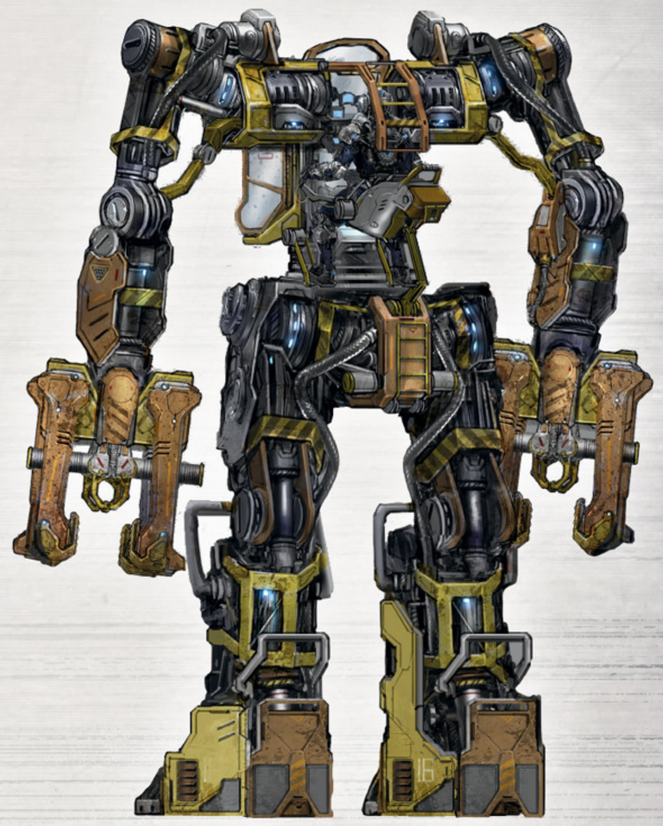


CONDOR

These are explorations of the Condor. The DeeBee planes are repurposed cargo ships that are now used to deploy DeeBee troops.

BUILDING MECH

The COG building mech is a huge bot that's controlled by a DeeBee and used to build the settlements. There are a lot of different uses for them, but it's a versatile lifting and building robot that a human could control if they needed to.

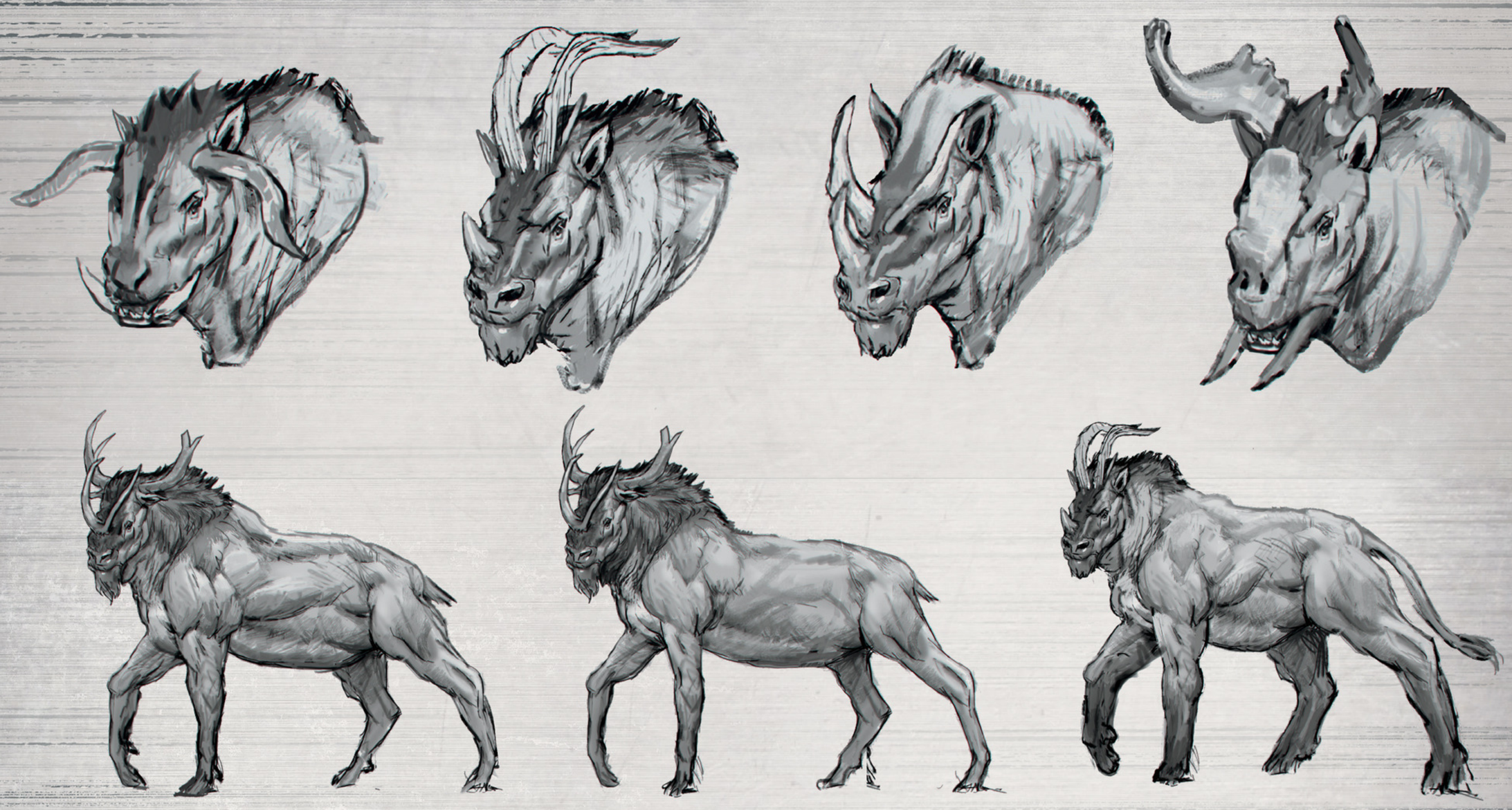


CHUZZ WAGON

The Chuzz Wagon was based on the notion of repurposing a previous vehicle. A wagon felt too Wild West, so we thought if you had a pickup truck that you pulled the engine out of, you could still sit in the cab, you had the bed in the back, and the Chuzz would pull it. It felt like the Outsiders patched it together to make it work.

CHUZZ

We explored the Chuzz to develop a beast for both work and transportation, but it had to feel like it belonged on Sera. We referenced horses and different animals and thought about how we could blend elements from them.



We landed on the idea of a horse with horns, a broader chest, and a slightly more alien silhouette.

HOME

REYNA DIAZ

This is Reyna, Kait's mom. We wanted to create a strong female character who was less like a supermodel and more realistic in terms of age and style so it didn't feel like she was Kait's sister. We also used the green and yellow color schemes to make her feel grounded to the earth. She's a warrior, so her character features cues in her outfit—objects like the sword and the combat knife.

REYNA DETAILS

Reyna's tattoo changed and became more detailed as the design process went on. We created a hair brooch that would allow her to pin her hair down on the top so it wouldn't fly around, but the ponytail would always stay in front.

In addition to the more natural browns and greens that Reyna wears, we used warm-colored metals and rivets to suggest a nice melding of the Outsiders' rustic look with a little bit of technology and *Gears of War*–type details.

VILLAGERS

We wanted to have a sequence inside the village where the player feels the presence of the Outsiders to add emotional weight when characters are taken by the Swarm. We explored different looks for the villagers, and a number of them are in the game as well.

WILLIAM

William is the only child with a voice in our game. We needed a character to relate to in the village who would also be taken by the monsters. He also needed to fit on a skeleton that we already had in the game, so we landed on a fourteen-to-fifteen-year-old. That way he's a five-and-a-half-foot person that still feels like a kid, as opposed to trying to use somebody who's three feet tall.

OUTSIDER VILLAGE

The Outsiders purposefully live outside of the Coalition of Ordered Governments. They don't exactly want to be part of that society, but they still live in a world that has technology. They have this pioneer vibe where they're using the resources around them, so things like wooden structures or reclaimed materials are integrated into their architecture and then paired with technology.

VILLAGE CONCEPTS

The Outsider village is nestled into the mountains, partly because that's how they protect themselves from the windflares that rip around Sera. We explored how the Outsider village would be stacked into the hillside and how they would use the windmills to harness energy.

Early on we had a notion that we would have two different Outsider villages, and each would be recognizable by its different power sources, so one would use windmills and waterwheels, and the neighboring village would rely on geothermal and would have lots of steam vents.

There was originally no sign of life in the settlement, and it felt like a deserted town from a Wild West movie. We added the satellite dishes and lights to make the setting feel like it was alive, and that's when it really started to resonate as a place that we wanted to visit.

KNIVES

We wanted to have a combat knife that all the character classes can use in multiplayer and in the campaign. We gave each faction its own knife: a Coalition combat knife, an Outsider knife, and a very primitive knife almost like a prison shiv, because there isn't a lot of technology for the Swarm. We just kept pushing to find designs that were stylized, brutal, or primitive enough.

COG COMBAT KNIFE

OUTSIDER DAGGER

SWARM SHIV

TAKEN

This is the moment when the villagers—including Reyna and William—get taken. The three heroes of the story are locked behind a door, so they're unable to actually do anything to stop the monsters until it's too late. What's cool about this cinematic is it's essentially the turn from day to night in our game. This is when night falls on the village and the terror emerges.

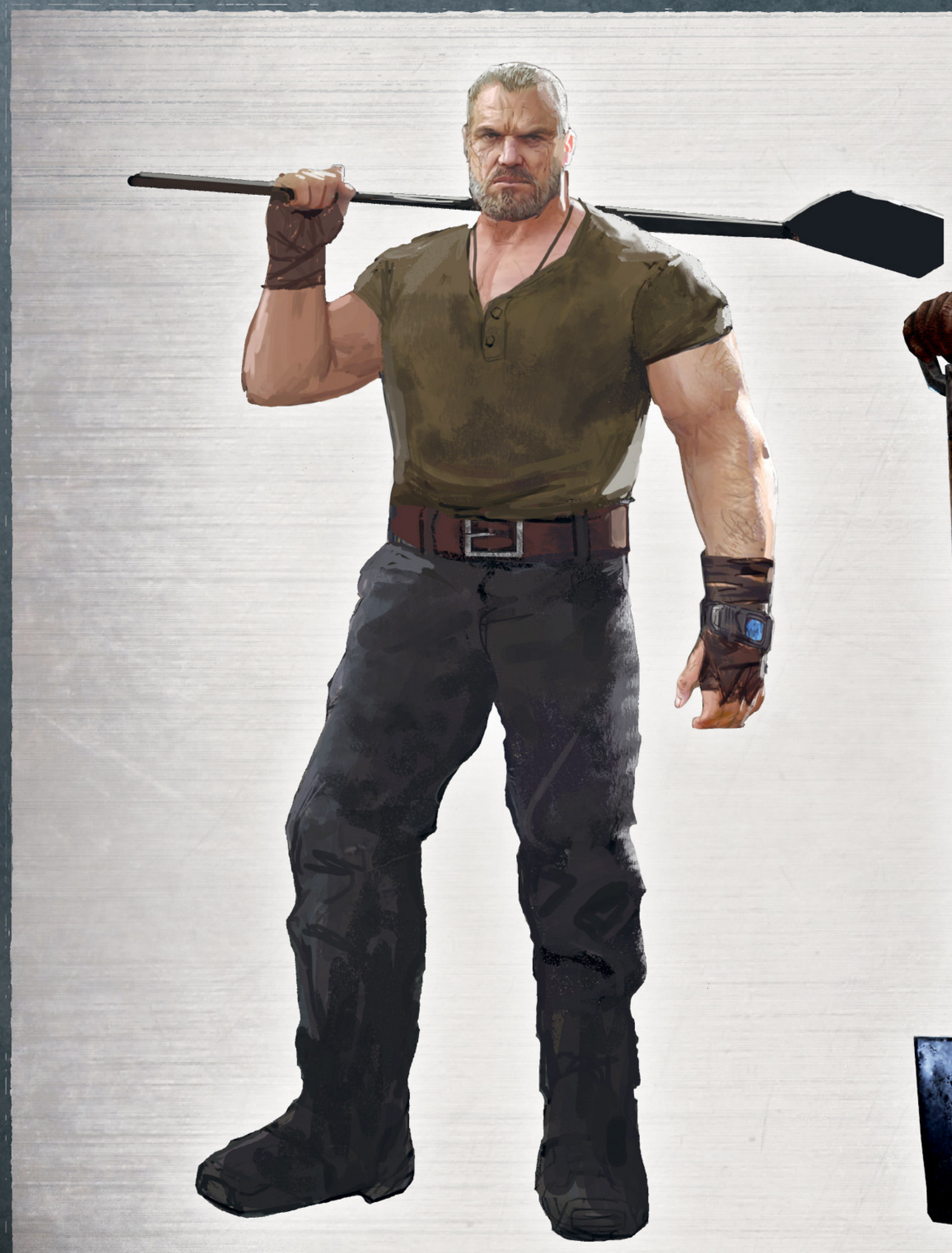
ACT II

As night falls and the Outsiders recover from the COG attack, a swarm of nightmarish monsters descends on the village, snatching everyone except JD, Kait, and Del. With nowhere else to turn, JD reluctantly travels to his childhood home, the dilapidated Stroud estate. Facing his estranged father, Marcus Fenix, JD convinces him to help them track the missing villagers. Before they can decide where to search, the COG attacks the estate, forcing Marcus to arm his new squad mates as he leads them on a dramatic escape into the Wilds.

FARM

OLD MAN MARCUS FENIX

We wanted Marcus to look like he had retired and become this old hermit. We see him out of armor for the first time as a farmer trying to keep up the estate. This is what a decorated war hero looks like after living on his own for twenty years.



The Lancer, though iconic, isn't very believable because it doesn't have a stock, making it very hard for Marcus to hold it against his shoulder to brace it. We decided that Marcus had customized his Lancer to be more practical. He built a wooden stock on it and simplified the loading mechanism so that it was easier to reload.

ARMOR

The early exploration for the new armor started to look like plastic motocross armor and felt very lean and thin. It didn't contribute to the *Gears of War* style. We actually had to take a number of steps back and bulk up the armor to make it feel like *Gears* armor.

This is an iconic moment in the game when the heroes, in their Outsider garb, enter the armory, where Marcus reveals that he's got armor for each of them. JD's and Del's armor is a new generation of COG armor from their time in the military. Kait is actually wearing Anya's armor from *Gears of War 3*.

STROUD ESTATE

We used Northern Italy as reference, so instead of looking for a mansion for the estate, we looked for a villa. We found actual villas that looked like this on our reference trip to Europe. We liked the idea of an Italian villa rather than just a rich Beverly Hills mansion.

ESTATE AND COTTAGE

This spread shows the estate in two stages: it's partially dilapidated but renovated and working. Marcus is living on the estate alone in this very reclusive lifestyle, but it gets torn up by the COG, and the whole villa lights on fire and starts to fall apart.

STROUD CONCEPTS

These images of the Stroud grounds allowed us to explore the mood and the structures within this setting. On this page we have Marcus's cottage (*top*) and a room in the main house (*bottom*). We felt that Marcus wouldn't want to live alone in the big, empty house, so he lives in the groundskeeper's cottage. On the facing page are lighting passes for a cellar, a greenhouse in the estate's garden, and a shot of the barrel shed after a Condor has crashed into it during the act's climax.

This is an in-game shot of what the barrel shed looks like after the Condor has crashed into it. It is a combination of windflares and combat that basically rips the estate apart.

GARDENS

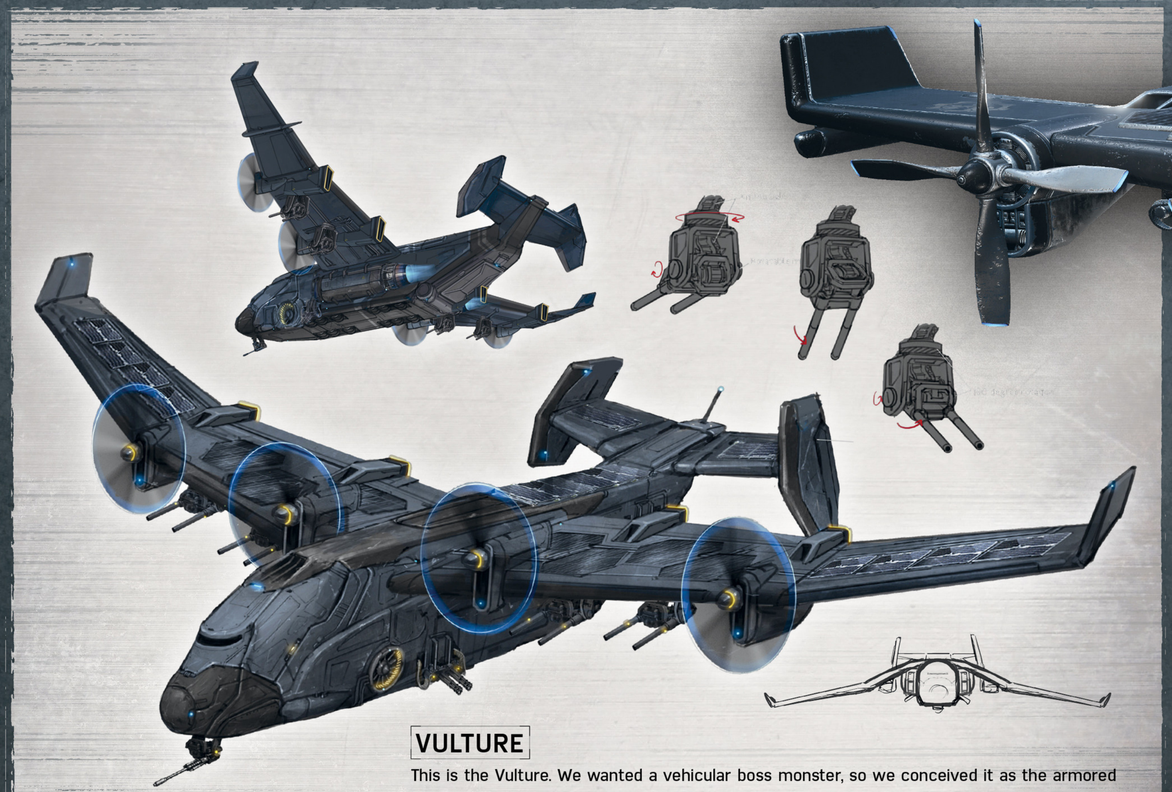
These are the gardens and vineyards the player comes across while crossing the estate. The mix of ornamental gardens and functioning vineyards is based on what we found in Northern Italy.

WINDMILL

That windmill is meant to be the destination landmark toward which we drive the player. The windmill is next to the barn so the player always has a place to go. We realized that if the windmill needed to be able to withstand Sera's windflares, it had to be more like a turbine.

VEHICLES

The new aerial vehicles are all controlled by DeeBees and able to fly by technology alone.



VULTURE

This is the Vulture. We wanted a vehicular boss monster, so we conceived it as the armored version of the Condor, like the AC-130 is to the C-130 cargo plane. The Vulture became a weaponized version of a cargo plane.

KESTREL

The Raven helicopter of the previous games was more of a cargo passenger helicopter. The Kestrel is a robot-controlled helicopter, so there's actually no pilot in it. We wanted it to have the ability to drop off a Jinn Bot or a robot if we needed it to. It's meant to serve as a boss villain in the game that can attack from the sky.

TRACK MULE

This is the Mule. The name is a play on *Hog*. We wanted to have a little joke where Marcus talks about having a couple of Mules in the barn, but he's actually referring to these motorcycles that he's been working on, and then there is this escape sequence on these cool, very *Gears* tank-tread bikes.

ACT III

Believing the Swarm is somehow linked to the Locust, Marcus leads JD, Del, and Kait to a ruined fort near a Locust burial site. As they enter the overgrown vestiges of the historical site, they discover an infestation of strange pods containing the missing COG citizens, breaking them down and re-forming them into twisted Swarm creatures. When the squad is surrounded, Marcus is snatched and taken into the catacombs beneath the fort. JD, Kait, and Del track him to the Locust burial site, where they discover that the Locust has evolved into a new form of Swarm.

FORT REVAL

These are the gates of Fort Reval, where Marcus takes JD, Del, and Kait while they figure out where the Swarm might have possibly come from. Marcus walks them through this historical site that was a makeshift military hospital in the Locust War. As they move through the level they see cots, gurneys, and other medical items. When they get to the tram, they go up to the tourist area and into a museum with lots of artifacts. We really liked the feeling of the fort as iconic *Gears* architecture that doesn't have to be part of a city. It still feels like it belongs out here in the Wilds.

RUINED TOWN

Before the group gets into the fort, they have to travel through the little town that's nearby. These are explorations of the streets where the town is situated. It's high in the mountains, and the streets have been reclaimed by nature, since the town was suddenly evacuated in the middle of this war and nobody's been back in quite some time.

FORT

STREET CONCEPT

This is the part of the fort that the Swarm has started to take over. In the fort, the characters discover plant-like organic tendrils that have started to creep through all the crevices. Attached to them are the Swarm pods that have Juvies growing inside of them. It brings together all the menacing, nightmarish elements of the ruins reclaimed by nature.

NARROW PASSAGEWAYS

These are the different structures and streets inside the fort. Narrow passageways lead into each building, and everything is dilapidated because the Swarm has pushed through and created holes in the walls. We played with the elements of moonlight and the player's flashlight to achieve these dark, creepy moments.

WORSHIP

These are explorations of a larger area lit by moonlight shining through holes in the walls, accentuating the feeling of the ruined nature of the fort.

This is an example of art and architecture coming together for game play while still having great visual layouts.

KEEP

The player sees the dilapidation of the spaces on approach to the barracks. We decided that we needed a light source other than moonlight, so the entire area is lit by gas lamps. The keep was inspired by Fenestrelle Fortress in Piedmont, Italy, which is a cliff-side fort that is built along the edge of a mountain.

LIGHTING

We were running into the issue of how to light this space. Two moons make for interesting moonlight, but they don't provide enough contrast. We had to sneakily add artificial lighting into the levels to give them some contrast and help identify the spaces.

MUSEUM AND BARRACKS

The concept for the keep as a historical site led to this museum setting, which memorializes the Pendulum Wars. Below is a shot of the keep's barracks. On the facing page is the burial site where Marcus is taken by the Swarm. Since Marcus has been the guide and he's now lost, the player is left following the Swarm's effect on the environment to find him, which ultimately leads down into the catacombs.

This is a concept for the pods. They have a membranous texture, and you can see that there's something inside of them.

PODS

Pods are a new feature for *Gears* and serve as both dynamic cover and a way to bring enemies into the world. When a pod is popped, one of three things happens: it's empty except for the remains of a human that's being digested; it contains a Juvie that the player is forced to hatch; or it houses a Screamer, which shouts a battle cry that pops all the pods around it. If the player gambles on popping a pod in combat due to a poorly thrown grenade or overshooting the enemy, it could actually make things worse.

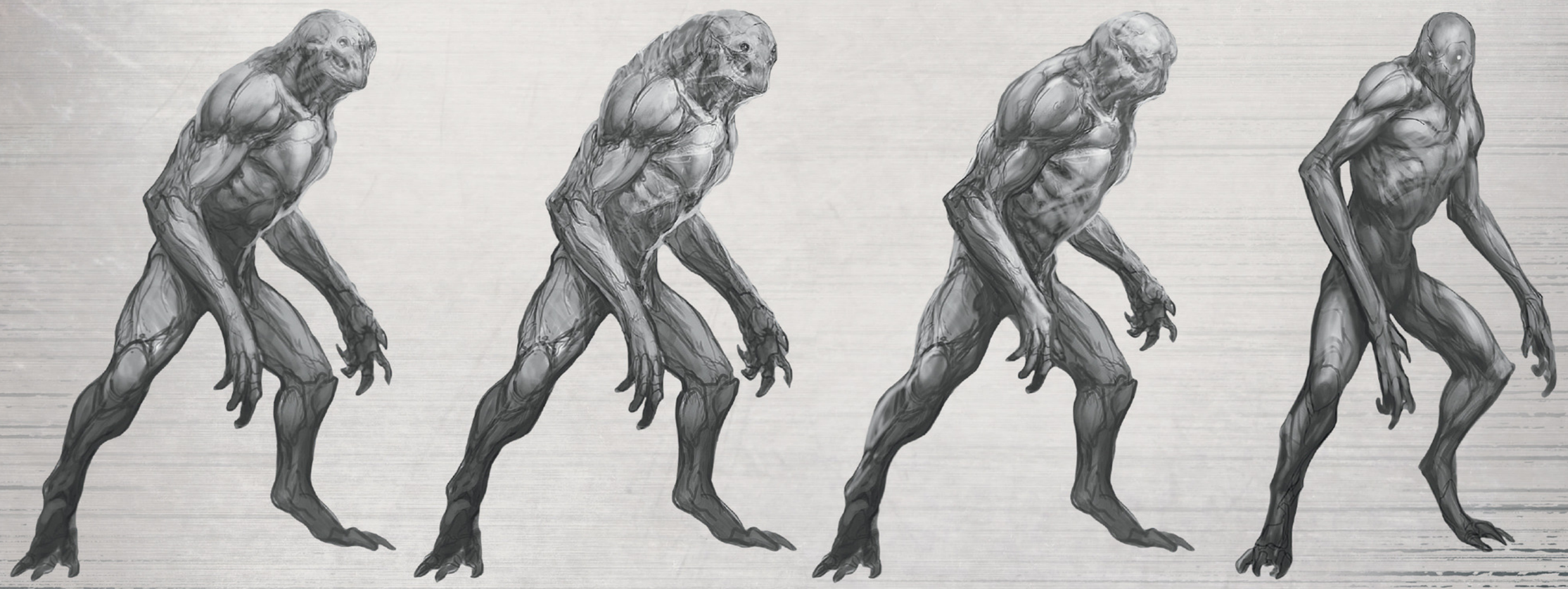
SCREAMER

The Screamer is a prematurely birthed Juvie that basically only has enough energy left in it to scream. We wanted to make it very clear that it isn't a Juvie, and we had this idea of something that can't quite get up and has misshapen limbs and doesn't have enough structure to actually stand. It yells to warn all the other pods to pop open.

JUVIE

This is a Juvie, the fully matured guys that come out of the pods and will eventually evolve into Drones. They have creepy, white translucent skin, and they're smaller than humans, but they are also incredibly fast and mobile. The Juvie originally had no face and was quite creepy with its milky eyes. The vasculature was visible underneath its skin. We soon realized this faceless creature didn't have enough expression—either for player experience or for the animators to capture the feeling that we wanted—so Dan Roarty, our character lead, resculpted the mouth and came up with this really cool design.

As with a lot of other Swarm enemies, the Juvies have a second set of nostrils to smell pheromone trails, and also to communicate with each other.



J.S. MARANTZ

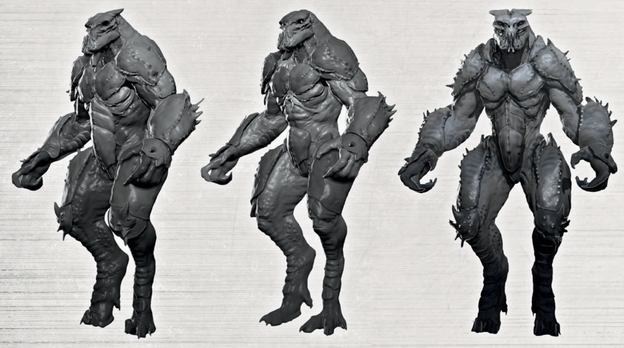
DRONES

It's core to *Gears* to have an enemy that is similar in ability and scale to the heroes—something that can take cover and hold a weapon. The Drones' armor is actually a part of their own bodies, and when they mature from being a Juvie and their armor hardens, it also cracks into different patterns, which gives them each a unique look.

IMAGO

The Juvies go into nests to mature into these Drones. When they emerge, they haven't fully hardened yet, so they come out as an Imago Drone that can hold weapons but continues to harden over time.

Each of the Drone classes has a very specific pattern. For example, some smear this white color across them, the Sniper has one of his eyes covered, the Grenadier has stronger shoulder pads to be better armored—things specific to their nature.



We wanted the Drones to be feral, monstrous, and basic because they were newly hatched and newly formed, but the lack of differentiation between them made it difficult to understand what was attacking during game play. We ended up adding a bunch of tech and clothing to change their shapes and make them stand out.

DRONE CLASSES

Once the Drones emerge and harden, they get these different shell patterns. We didn't want them fully armored, but they scavenge whatever is around, so they build belts or loincloths to carry ammo and weapons as they mature.

This is the Rifle Drone class. Its crossed bandoliers and a bit of tech on the shoulders and lights help identify its class and unit. Game play dictates that we have differentiation among the classes, and we have lights that allow us to easily tell from a distance who is friend and who is foe.

DRONE CONCEPTS

We moved away from the double-jointed knees and different stances because the Drones needed to be able to behave similar to the player, especially for multiplayer. It felt right to give them more human proportions, but with a variety of necklines, facial features, and shell structures.

POUNCER

The Pouncer is one of the first creatures we created to help differentiate the Swarm from the Locust. It has quills in its tail that it can throw to force the player into cover, and then it can land and flush the player out. It was also designed with cooperative play in mind, because once it jumps on top of the player, they really need their co-op buddy or someone in their squad to free them. We always thought of it like a big-chested mastiff dog. Since its main purpose is to jump, we wanted really big back legs to show that it has power, but it has tiny little front legs, so if it jumps too hard and misses, it throws itself off balance.

SNATCHER

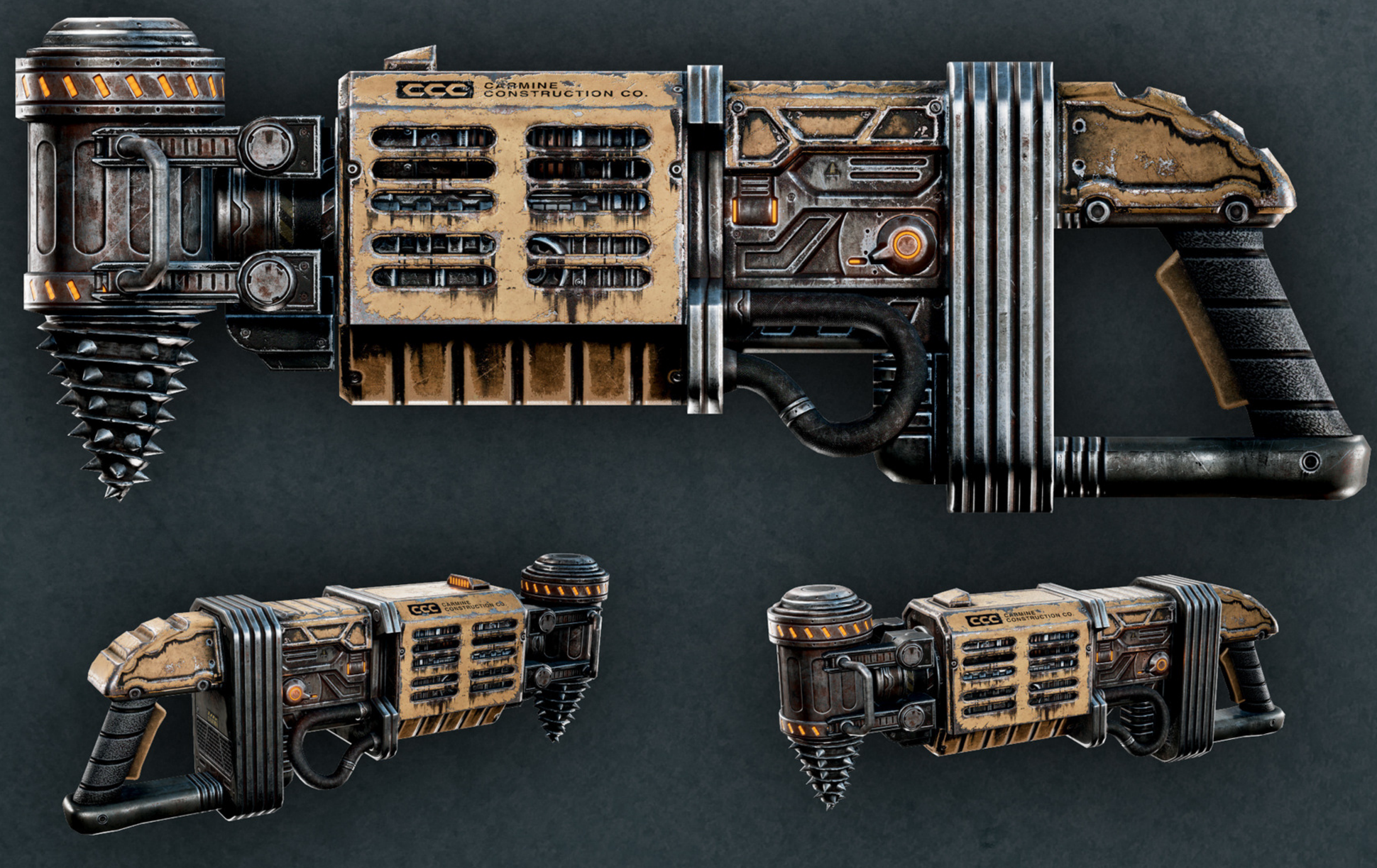
The Snatcher is actually the evolved version of the Pouncer. If you look at the way the Snatcher is built, you can see it's got the same overall aesthetic. This character is an important part of the evolution of our enemy army, since it creates the pods, which create Juvies, which turn into Drones, and then the cycle goes on and on.

The Snatcher is able to unzip its stomach from its chin like a sleeping bag, and all of these tongues and tendrils come out of its chest cavity to pull a victim up into it so that it can coat it and turn it into a pod. It then deposits it against a wall, a ceiling, or a floor so that it can eventually go through the process of creating a Juvie.

IMPROVISED WEAPONS

These construction tools have a typical *Gears* style. First is the Buzzkill, which is essentially a giant cement saw with an ejection mechanism that allows the player to fling saw blades out into the battlefield. They bounce around the space, violently cutting things into pieces when they hit them.

This is the Drop Shot, which is a mining tool. This is a remote-detonated drill bit that fires out over the battlefield and has a little laser target. When it's over the point where the player wants to drill, they let go, and it shoots the top cap off the drill bit, driving it straight down into the earth before it explodes.



HIVE

HIVE

As the main characters follow the Snatchers and the Swarm to find Marcus, the player eventually discovers the Nest. This is an old mining facility that housed a Locust burial site. The mine becomes more heavily swarmed the further the team delves, and it eventually links to a maze of ancient catacombs deep beneath the surface.

CATACOMBS

As the heroes descend underneath the keep, they find the catacombs of old—this preserved historical space has been taken over by the Swarm. As they travel through the catacombs, they descend further and further into the ornate tombs of old kings and warriors. There are three tiers: the first is the peasant tier, built with simple materials and not very ornate; the second is the warrior tier, which holds statues of old soldiers; and the final tier is the kings' chamber.

PLATFORM

This platform is heavily influenced by a nautical ship with a bridge serving as a control center. It's got engine rooms, grinding platforms, and lift mechanisms, and it functions like an oil platform with a shipping deck. The characters ride it down into the mine as it gets darker and darker.

MINES

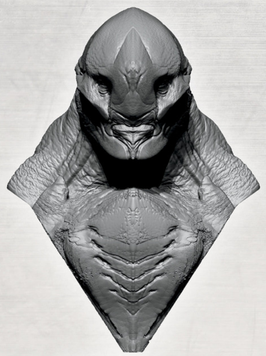
The idea here is that this mining facility was abandoned before the war, and the COG used it after the war as a top-secret location to dispose of Locust corpses that had formed mysterious crystallized shells. The mine itself was inspired by big underground mining structures in the United States.

This is the heart of the hive, with the highest density of pods. This is where the Snatchers have been going, but it's also the Locust burial site. JD is standing on the crystals, the remnants of all the crystallized Locust corpses, surrounded by Swarm pods.

JS. MARANTZ

SCION

Whereas the Swarm Drones and Juvies are actually being harvested from humans, the Scions are the Locust reborn and evolved when they come out of their crystal shells. They're taller and tougher now, and they've repurposed a lot of their old armor. They've also got the crystallization built into them from their birthing process. The concept design shown opposite features a Locust belt strapped around its shoulders, with pants made of old pieces of Locust armor.



These are more refined explorations of the Scion head. We tried different, more alien head, chin, and eye shapes, but we eventually landed on something closer to the Locust.

In addition to being taller and tougher than the Locust, the Scions also have amber-colored crystals embedded in their bodies as a result of their exposure to the Imulsion Countermeasure Weapon.

ACT IV

At the heart of the hive, JD releases a barely conscious Marcus from a freshly planted pod. Freed from the Swarm network, Marcus reveals that Reyna, Kait's mother, is being treated differently from the other villagers and has been taken to another burial site. The group travels to an abandoned dam, racked by windflares, that protects a huge infestation of Swarm. Marcus leads the squad toward a nearby radio tower where they plan to call for help, but before they can cross the dam they encounter a huge mutated Locust beast, the Swarmak.

TOLLEN DAM

After Marcus has been rescued from the hive, he reveals that Kait's mother has been taken to another hive on the other side of this hydroelectric dam. This is the approach to the dam along the street. The Tollen Dam is yet another old battlefield from the Locust War, so surrounding it are remnants of the conflict.

DAM APPROACH

The player emerges from the underground mines on cables leading to the surface. From there they take this approach toward the dam along the riverbed. There are wheels in front of the dam that are used to harness power. Upon entering the dam they see these huge wheels from a different angle, so we needed to demonstrate the scale as well.

DAM HEADS

The heads signify the four sources of energy. The design needed to be something that made artistic sense and also served as a windbreak for the combat across the top of the dam. We tried versions with standing men, kneeling men, and men kneeling on one knee before deciding on just the heads themselves. Scale presented a big problem for us. What looks good from a distance might not look good up close. It also has to be functional and useful when you get to the top of the dam.

DAM CONCEPTS AND RENDERS

Windflares have been ravaging this area for some time. They have tossed different parts of the dam infrastructure around, like the big turbine wheel. Opposite, you can see the way that the Swarm has found nooks and crannies out of the wind but still near the hive behind the dam.

DAM INTERIOR

The first goal inside the dam is to bring power back online, so once the player gets the turbines spinning using the windflares, the lights turn back on. This is the generator room where that happens. There's no water behind the dam, so it's got this old, empty feeling. As the player makes their way up the dam, they go from the dark depths into the more functional areas with the chains and mechanisms that drive all of the electrical generators.

Vehicles would use this approach to enter the dam, still littered with remnants of the last stand during the Locust War. It's now been reclaimed by nature and the Swarm. Below is the generator room before the dam is reactivated.

The generator room after reactivation. Once the player has the turbine going, their task is to activate all of the generators so that the power can go through the rest of the dam. We wanted a larger-than-life feeling, as if when these switches are flicked, something massively important has happened, but the Swarm has also been awakened.

The chain room. This is a series of huge cogs and chains that drive key dam mechanisms. It felt cool for the environment and the architecture to work with the game play since the chains are all broken up and move around to create a moving-cover puzzle that the player fights through.

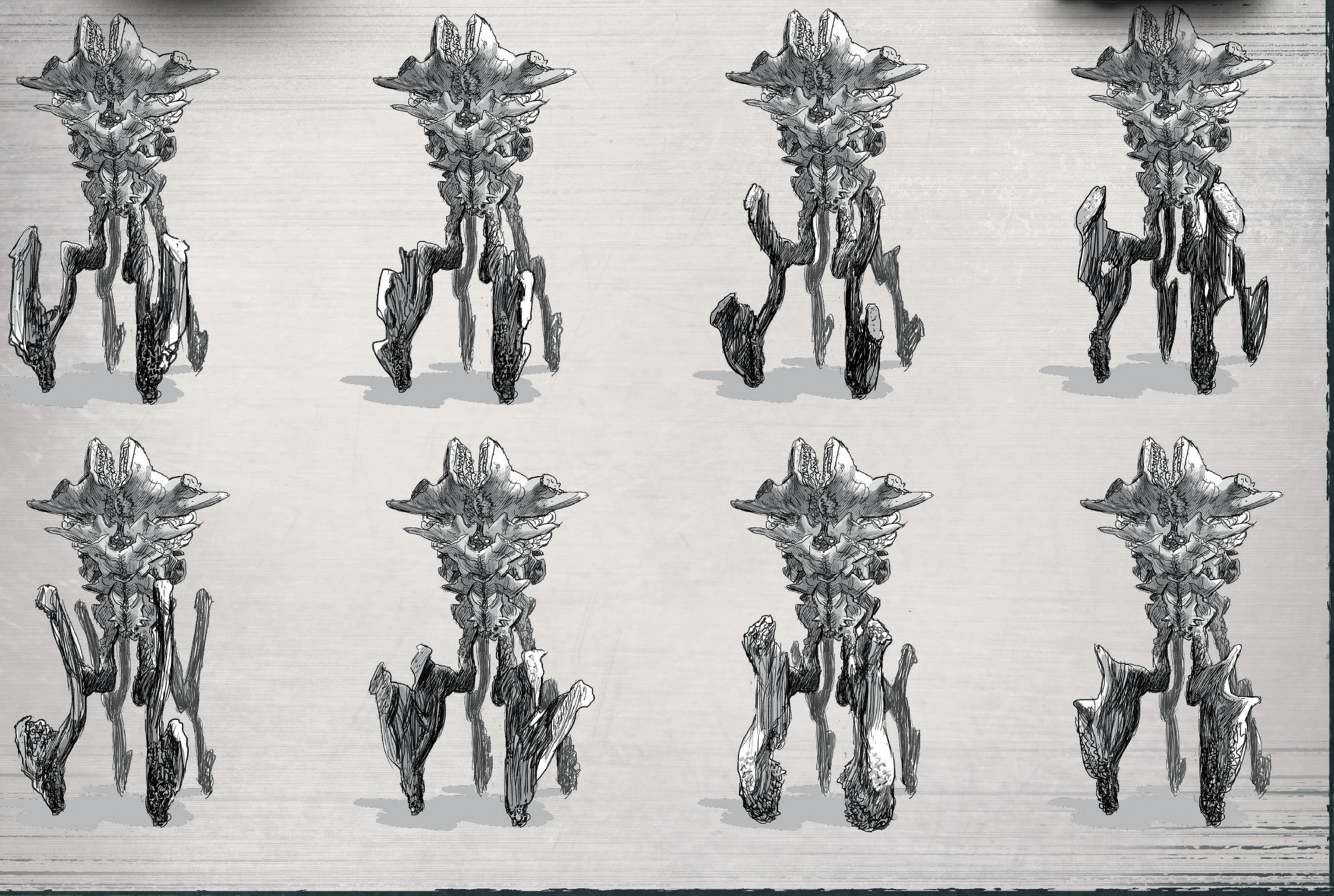
SUBSTATION

The substation is essentially the end of the dam. It's the way station between the power that's being generated by the dam and the power that goes out to the nearby towns.

CAUTION
WATCH YOUR STEP

CARRIER

The Carrier is one of the big enemies that we introduce around Tollen Dam. It's almost like a living aircraft carrier with these organic torpedoes that we call Cankers. It's huge, and it drags itself around with its massive claws. If the player gets too close, the Carrier will either smash them, knocking them back, or just pick them up for big damage.



ELITE DRONE

This is the Elite Drone. It's the most intelligent of all the Drones and behaves the most like the player. This is the one Drone that we armored up a little more than the other guys to show its power and elite status.

SWARMAK

The idea for the Swarmak was that a Brumak began to undergo the crystallization process, but the process was halted before completion and it never fully crystallized. We were excited to try this new variation on a classic *Gears* creature.

SPEAKER

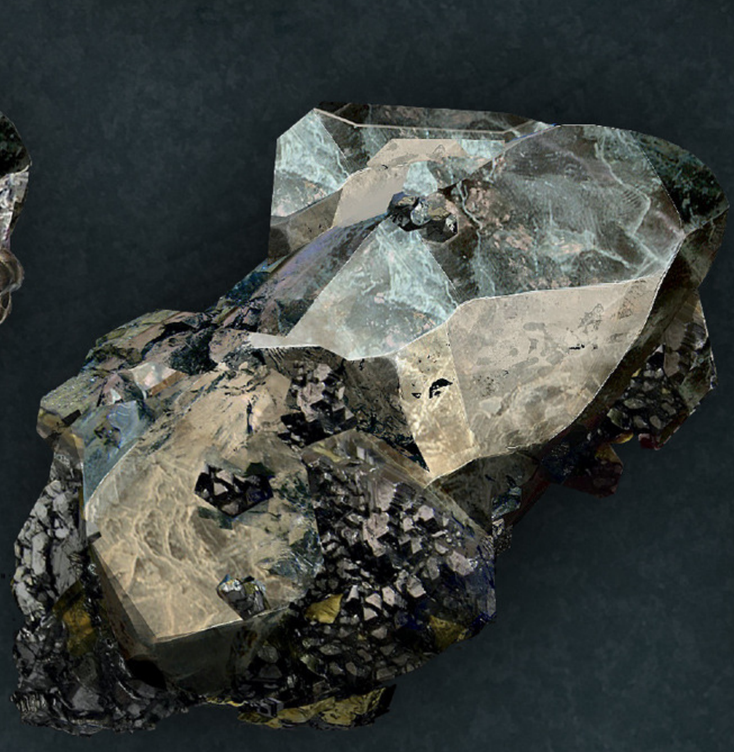
This is the Speaker, the main Scion. This is the Scion who took Reyna and whom the player has been chasing ever since. The Speaker is covered in crystals, and the weapons and parts of its body are very tough. In the scene when the villagers are being taken, there's a fight between the Speaker and Reyna where Reyna chops off the Speaker's hand; this helps identify it later when the player confronts it in the power substation. The Speaker's encrusted face also makes it unique and identifiable as a nasty Scion that you can feel good about taking down.

CONFRONTATION

The Speaker is the Scions' military leader. When the team finally tracks it down at the power substation, it unleashes the Swarmak—a mutated Brumak—on the heroes.

CRYSTALS

The Locust ended up having a crystal layer on top of them, and over time this formed into a crystal pod, inside of which they evolved into these new creatures. We didn't want the crystals to feel too much like gemstones, because then they would seem as if they naturally belonged in the mine. We wanted to explore having geometric shapes and edges like those of a crystal, but then adding organic, curved shapes to make them feel unnatural.



ACT V

As night lifts, JD, Marcus, Kait, and Del arrive at Speyer, an old COG factory center from the Locust War. Here the COG DeeBees face the Swarm for the first time and are completely overwhelmed. Pushing through the infested town, Marcus enters the radio tower to call for reinforcements. With the sun rising over the mountains, the group fends off waves of Swarm until help arrives, in the form of old friends and new toys. Piloting armored versions of the COG's huge builder mechs, the squad smashes through the town toward the dam and the hive beyond it to face a huge Swarm beast that protects Reyna.

RADIO

SPEYER

The heroes' departure from the dam signals another big shift in the game. They head to the nearby town of Speyer when they see it has a radio antenna left over from the Locust War, and they plan to use it to call for backup because the hive behind the dam is too big for them to take out on their own. More importantly, this is where the game transitions from night back into day. Almost everything about the Swarm has been revealed now, and the player understands the threat. They're out of the darkness and into the home stretch, so we wanted to explore the feeling of predawn in this act.

TOWER

As soon as the player enters the level, the radio tower is the first thing they see. As with the construction hub, the windmill, or the four-headed dam, they know right away that the radio tower is their destination.

This is an earlier exploration of Speyer when we were trying to decide what time of day it was, how much daylight we wanted to bring into the space, and what we wanted the transition to feel like. We ultimately decided to make it brighter than this.

The entrance to Speyer. The idea is that the town was built around a factory, but it's fallen into ruin.

DELTA SQUAD

One goal in Speyer is to call for help in the form of previous teammates from Delta Squad. We explored through weight gain and aging what Cole and Baird look like now that they're in their sixties. Like Marcus, both Cole and Baird are wearing their original, classic armor. These concepts lean toward the notion of believable art direction. It was meant to feel like the original armor from *Gears* and *Gears 2* but more realistic.

HIVE

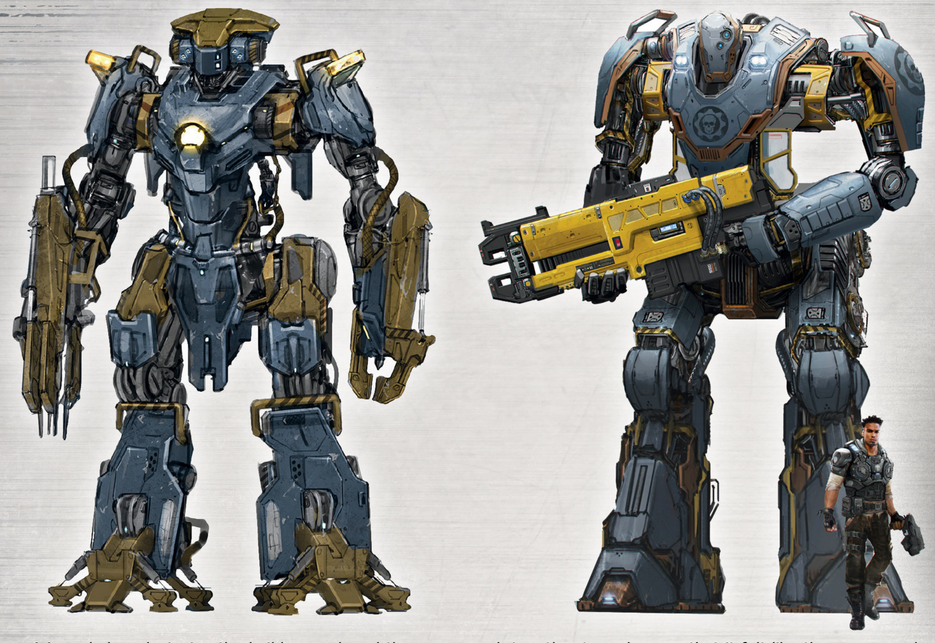
This is the last push to reach the heart of this huge hive. We wanted it to feel like it goes deeper than what the player actually sees and that Reyna is being held at the epicenter. The orange glow in the background is meant to be the place where Reyna is kept. It's a guiding light, but there's an obstruction. This was to be where the monster would emerge to protect her.

TOWN CENTER

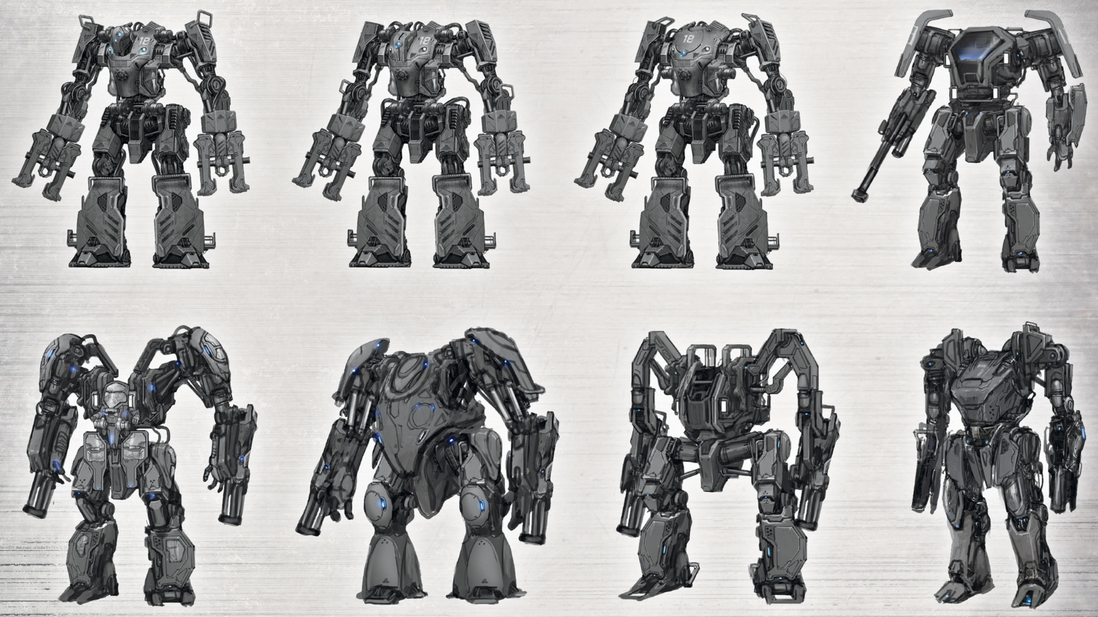
At the end of the Speyer mission, Baird shows up with militarized versions of the builder mechs seen earlier in the game. The player can't go the way they came to get back to the dam with these big mechs, so they have to go through the town that lies between Speyer and the dam and smash it up. We got to play with how the destruction works with bridges and all sorts of things to knock down. We also got to show a little bit more of the Wilds in the daytime, like the forests that run up the mountains and the high, craggy peaks. We wanted a sense of scale—we wanted them to feel like they're this large, powerful thing, and so we felt like the easiest way to do that was to have them walk through something that they'd walked through before at a normal size. We wanted them to feel as big as a two-story building while stomping around and destroying stuff just by walking through it.

MEGA MECH

Here's a giant mech. Similar to how the DR-1s are an exoskeleton strapped around a Shepherd, the mech that Baird brings is this controllable, militarized, armored version of the builder mech. The builder mech's main parts and yellow coloring are there, but all the blue stuff to protect the player is new. It doesn't actually have a gun, so what Baird brings is the staple gun that the builder mechs in the previous levels were using to affix huge pieces to the settlements.



We ended up designing the builder mech and the mega mech together to make sure that it felt like the mega mech was an armored version of what was seen earlier in the game.



THAT

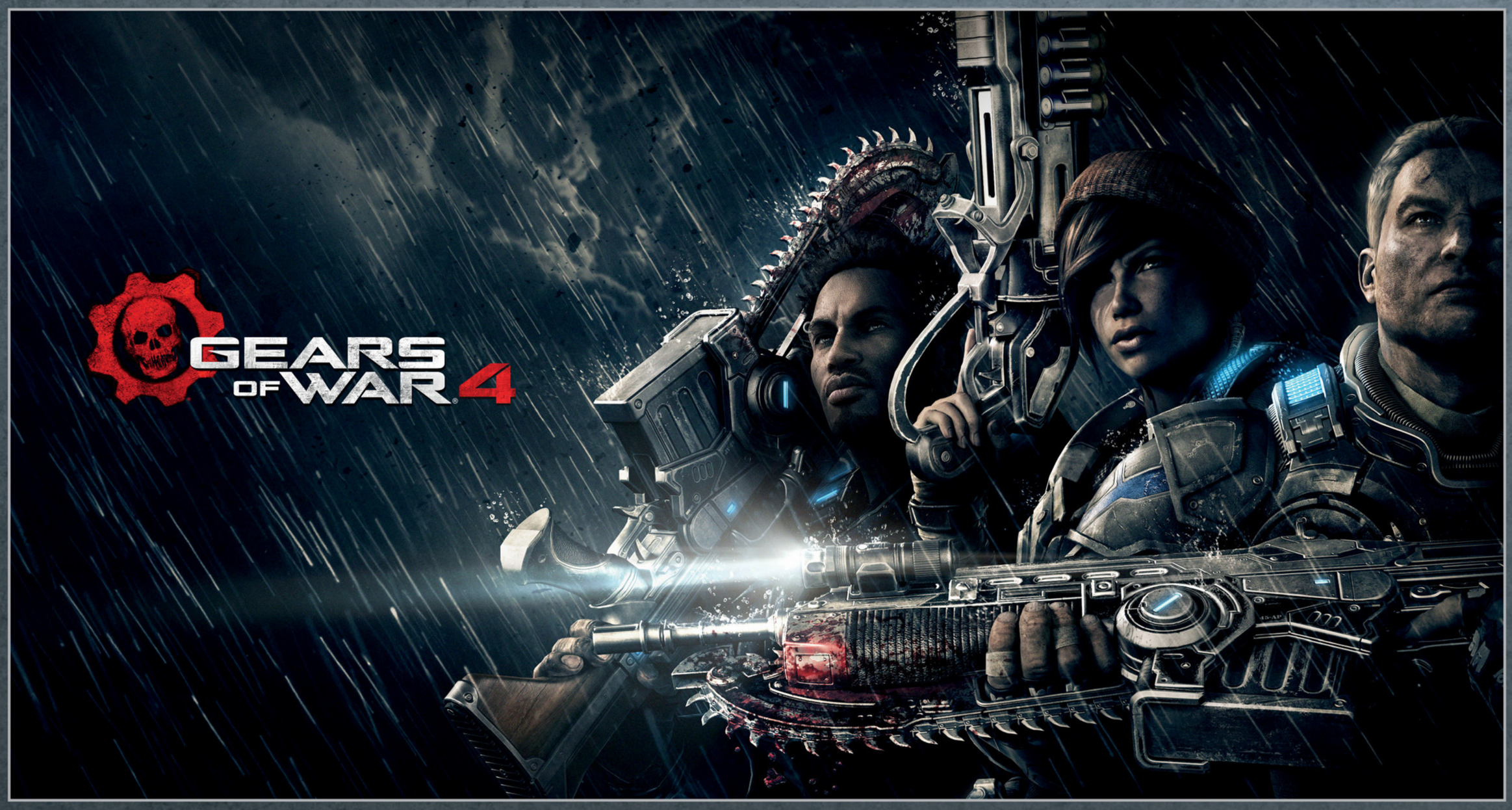
The hive boss known as “That” is encountered behind the dam in the last hive. It echoes the design of the Swarm, so it’s got massive tentacles similar to the tails you’ve seen on the Pouncer and the Snatcher; it has the framework of the shells and the feeling of all the Swarm creatures. It is massive. The player is in a mech, but we needed to make That bigger, so it basically takes up the entire river behind the dam.

At one point we wanted to have tentacles coming from under its body that keep regrowing, but we ended up putting sockets on its shoulders so the player knows how many they need to take out.

3300
37
DANGER

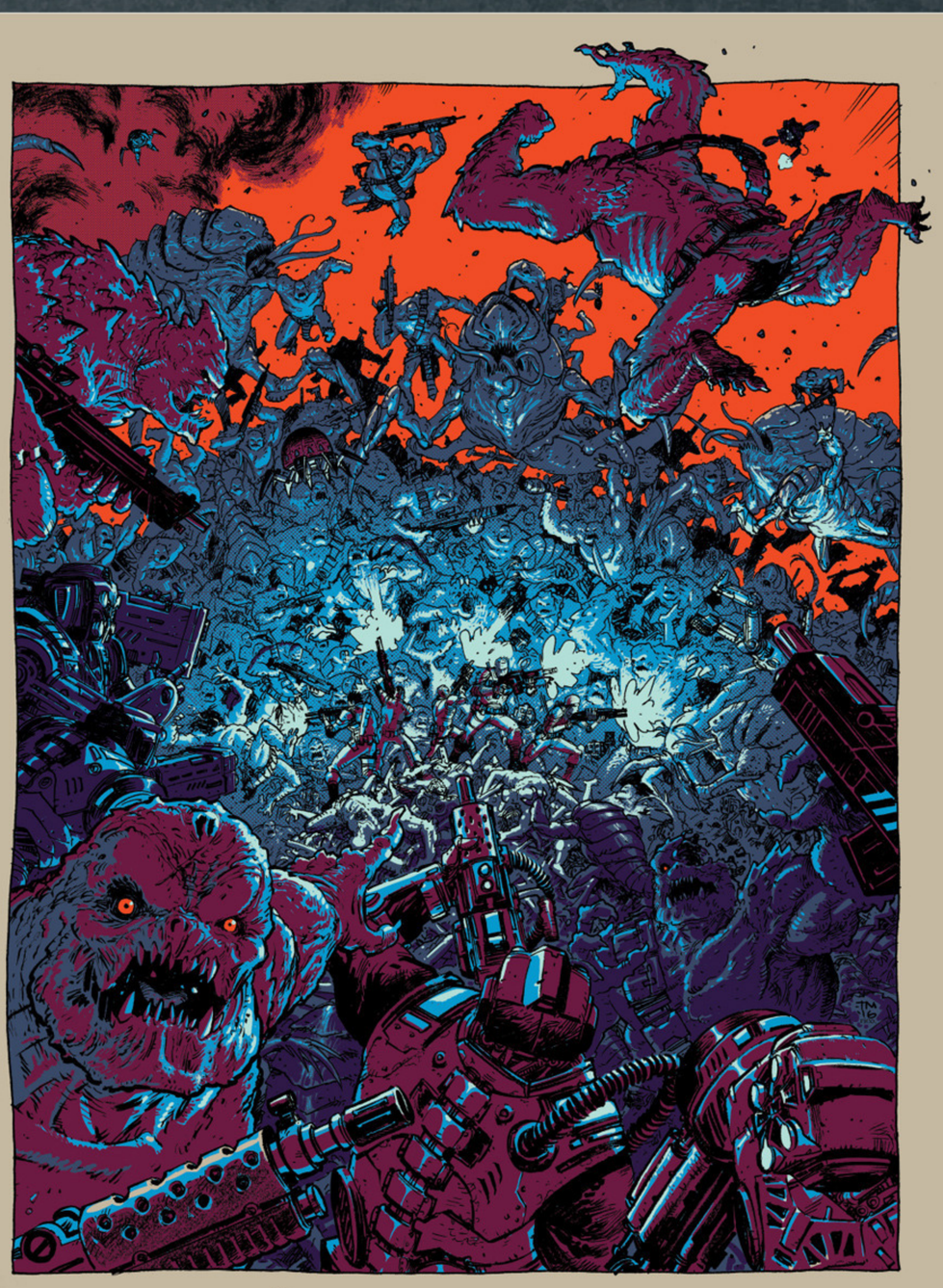
MARKETING

The *Gears of War* franchise has a rich history working with artists to create inspired works that help build out and add to its brand identity. With *Gears of War 4*, we were able to work with some of the very best street and urban artists, which resulted in inspired art pieces that were showcased throughout various marketing and event campaigns leading up to launch.



This image was featured as one of the first reveals for the main characters through *Game Informer*. *Below: Gears*-inspired artwork from GOD MACHINE, HYDRO74, and Jesse Hernandez.

Artwork by comic book artist Tony Moore.



HORDE CLASSES

Soldier

Engineer

Sniper

Heavy

Scout

CAMPAIGN DIFFICULTY ICONS

Casual

Normal

Hardcore

Insane

MULTIPLAYER RANK BADGES

VERSUS MODE ICONS

FACTION ICONS

MULTIPLAYER MAPS

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THE ART OF GEARS OF WAR 4

The *Gears of War* series has revolutionized third-person-shooter action with its gorgeous environments, iconic characters, and brutal action. Now, to commemorate the continuation of the *Gears* epic, Dark Horse Books and The Coalition present *The Art of Gears of War 4*, featuring hundreds of individual pieces of art, finished renders, and commentary from the game's creators.

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